PsychoBarcodeTranslations

金金金The young girl didn't know how long she had been there, but she had found herself living in an old church as though it was natural. Outside, she practiced martial arts in the square; its gate was a stately one that connected to a solid wall, and the public order was kept by a local garrison of armed troops.

金金金The current state of the world had been hammered into her via "education"; however, she had not learned anything practical. Perhaps there was some use to it all, but she could not remember any of the geography that she was taught.

金金金She could, however, gain a sense of faraway lands when she raised her eyes to the sky's great flaming celestial body; only while gazing at the red, shining, sun could she feel creation's immensity. Like this she grew a fondness for the sight of a cloudless sky. She understood the sun and the heights to which it rose, and it became her primary connection to the outside world. She always enjoyed the warmth of its rays and above all else, her hair and the sun shared a colour.

金金金With her love for the sun, a distaste for grey skies was only natural. The sound of rain caused her to feel as though her very existence was being erased. The beloved rays that previously warmed her were blocked by the darkness of rain clouds, and while it was a certainty that she would dislike any day of heavy rain, the worst part was the night that followed.

"Number 8, number 13! Step forth!"

"Yes."

"Yes."

金金金At the teacher's signal, with wooden swords gripped in their hands, the two stood.

"Begin."

金金金At the emotionless signal, the two simultaneously began to practice their combat forms. The children of the church were unnamed; they choose partners and the teachers assigned them numbers. The teachers, in His Majesty's honour, were to name the children when they came of age. They once asked about the possibility of naming themselves, and were met with a response of pure anger such that the matter was not brought up again. Names were of great significance, and with the help of the church's teachings, they quickly understood their importance.

金金金The outcome mirrored a dozen of her prior matches, a light faint which would be followed up with the girl swinging with all of her might. She swung repeatedly, making contact each time, and grazed the young number 8's head. In that time, the young man kicked her with great force and knocked her down. His sword was then quickly thrust to her throat and was followed by the order to stop.

"Number 8, well done."

"Thank you."

"But as for number 13 here, you're hopeless yet again. Your memory fails you, and your movements are dull. I'm telling you this for your own sake. What a failure."

“Apologies.”

“Do you forget that the only reason you’re alive is because of my kindness? By all accounts it wouldn’t be strange to say that it’s too late for you to clean up your act.”

“I understand.”

金金金The teachers wore white robes while they taught the children, who would in turn study and train in the church. The children had a harsh lifestyle, and there had been an unfortunate number of students who suffered serious accidents. The girl hated her teacher, but since he taught so many students, merely recognising her face was a difficulty. To him they all looked the same, and this was multiplied by the fact that he had neither any reason, nor any intentions to learn about his students. Deep inside him, there was a good man, but his students never found out. He needed to teach them with fists, kicks, and harsh words so there was no benefit in strong attachments. The most boring part of all was the teacher’s daily praise because they always repeated the same words at the end of lessons or training.

“We offer our greatest honours, and most heartfelt gratitude to his majesty Befnam the great!”

“We swear unconditional loyalty to the motherland!”

“May the banner of the Sun, never be sullied!”

“Death to those who would oppose the Horshiedo Empire! For that purpose, we are its sword and shield!”

金金金What were they even supposed to be thankful for? Why did they have to swear their loyalty? The girl couldn’t remember a single thing that could obligate them to dedicate their lives to that kind of cause. Most people had neither the reason nor the will to become like swords, and being sacrificed as shields was even more unthinkable. Because the girl could not think of any sufficient explanations, she honestly asked her teacher.

“His Majesty Befnam, inheritor of our founding father Emperor Bergis’ blood, is the most revered man of our era. It is because of His Majesty that we can exist in peace and tranquility; therefore, we must swear our undying loyalty to His Majesty. We owe a great debt to His Majesty, which we must strive to pay back with all our power.”

金金金If she were to continue such a life, the girl was sure she could find no happiness. After all, she had absolutely no idea what he was talking about.

“Listen well, number 13. To question His Majesty, and thereby our great Empire, is always unacceptable behavior. You, o insolent one, are to respect His Majesty Befnam as you would your own father, and Horshiedo, our homeland, as you would your mother. You must never forget this one thing; engrave it into that empty head of yours if you have to!”

金金金Still without knowing what it meant, she readily nodded in the face of his anger. Suddenly, she asked if it was okay to refer to His Majesty as ‘dad’. A father must have a family, and if she truly was that family, then calling him ‘dad’ was the obvious thing to do. That being said, the teacher’s face burned bright red, and he flew into a rage, shouting as he struck her.

“Blasphemy!”

金金金With his voice raised, he repeatedly kicked the helpless girl as she curled up on the floor. From that day forward, she harboured a deep resentment for “His Majesty”. In her new eyes, all bad things came from “His Majesty”. She could not understand the need to respect him like a father.

金金金After much thought, she found she also could not understand those who would oppose the banner of the Sun. The banner didn’t even resemble the sun. Compared to the real thing, it was too small, and riddled with fripperous

designs. It was a total forgery, not sunlike at all.

金金金Looking at it, she thought: *Compared to me, your flag is a failure.*

金金金When she shared her opinions with the number 8 boy he advised, “You’ll just anger him again, so it’s best to keep quiet.”

金金金Even though number 8 was a fellow redhead, it seemed he thought quite differently from her. She had even asked him if he honestly saw the sun in that banner.

“Yea, and it’s actually quite good; see how those outlines show the rays. It really captures the sun’s essence doesn’t it,” is what he answered.

金金金To each his own, I guess. She thought.

金金金Her monotonous days in the church continued. For the children around her age, “education” and “training” continued day after day after day; on sunny days, on rainy days, on snowy days; in the morning, afternoon, and night; endlessly repeating again and again. As for reading and writing, it was a given that difficult words were pounded into their heads for memorization. They learned too, how to salute, how to behave around their superiors as well as how to use respectful language. The teachers became superior officers who offered corporal punishment as blessed guidance to those who erred.

金金金From start to finish, they were taught standardized battle tactics for the purpose of destroying the fools who would oppose His Majesty’s Empire.

金金金For what purpose did they stand? The girl would ask, and be beaten for it.

“When you come of age, you will enter His Majesty’s service. In return for your upbringing, you will work hard. …. Well, not that I expect any of you to survive your test.”

金金金I didn’t really want to bring it up, but I’m leaving now, was what she wanted to say, although she ended up holding in. Once again she sat in her room, thinking about how her compliance felt disgusting. In rooms with no signs of light she had repeated that line, “All for the sake of His Majesty.” She had repeated it to the point of madness day after day. Her voice was tired and her throat was dry; it was so bad she might have died. In that place of cyclical suffering, the girl came to hate “His Majesty” to death. She began to think that she’d rather kill than honour him any more.

金金金Through such troubling times, her only enjoyment was found during mealtime, for the gentle smiles of the other children had also faded away. The girl, without laughter, shared her enjoyment of the meals with the others. However, there was a day from which point onwards the meals became dull.

金金金The children were all to drink a black liquid. It was a medicine to strengthen the body, but its murky demeanor was akin to muddy water. Although the other children obediently drank up, the girl couldn’t endure it. Not only was its appearance abhorrent, but its smell was worse than anything she’d ever smelled before. It tasted like rust.

金金金Refusing to go on, and shaking her head, the girl was smacked, and had the liquid forcefully rammed down her throat. Breathing became painful, and she was simultaneously attacked with violent nausea.

“It’s too soon for rejection. Was it diluted to the specified concentration?”

“It was, there’s no mistake. The other children are already okay.”

“… The amount varies from person to person, so even if we calculate it properly, there will always be some anomalies.”

“Why is *she* the special one? Not that it’d be shocking to lose her… There’s no reason to help now, so why don’t we just clean this up already?”

“Not yet. Let’s treat her for now. She probably won’t survive until the test, but this should serve as a good reference for our ‘Operation Daybreak’. Waste not, want not.”

“Understood. Isolate her, and continue observations.”

金金金The girl walked the line of life and death for three days, ever nearing the abyss. By some miracle, she survived, and from that day on, taking the black drug stopped causing her to vomit blood.

金金金Unfortunately, she hadn’t felt any of its benefits. The girl was impaired instead, and had been dubbed as the “number one failure.” She could no longer recognize people’s faces without great effort. At least the number 8 boy helped ease her burden in any way he could.

金金金She did not know how many years she spent in that uneventful church. Children disappeared, and in their places, new arrivals steadily increased in number. Initially over one hundred strong, they had decreased by half, only to be reinforced by fresh faces. Their numbers had even managed to increase to 200 without her noticing.

金金金The new arrivals already had names rather than numbers, but in the church they were forbidden from using them. Those who rebelled were placed in the room the girl hated most, and for a while, when the time came to sleep, ceaseless cries echoed in the halls. Such a sound caused the girl much grief; ultimately however, the new arrivals gradually acclimated. Nighttime crying gradually transformed into stifled laughter. The girl too found some happiness. The new children knew many things about the outside world. Their stories were always an interesting listen, and the girl worked with all her might to inscribe their every detail into her memories.

金金金The boy numbered 123 was the best of them all; with his extensive knowledge, his stories were always the most interesting ones. When the teachers weren’t looking he’d tell wonderful, enjoyable tales. Through his stories, she was able to gain a good sense of the outside world. She couldn’t quite recognise his face, but she could tell he was a healthy young man with a smile like the sun.

金金金Number 123, in only half of a year, withered away and died. Until his very end, all he could do was moan in pain. It was once again impossible to hear a good story. The girl felt drained.

金金金Number 150, who moved into number 123’s old room was the girl who became her best friend. With a quivering voice and a face that always appeared about to cry, it was during this time that she managed to brighten up. Before bed, number 150 would read a picture book that she had smuggled in.

金金金The book she brought had a cat with the unusual name: Noel. The story revolved around how it left its home, and travelled the world. Because the girl couldn’t recognise the writing in it, number 150 would sneak into her room in order to read to her every night. She crawled into her futon, and the two of them would read until they were too tired to go on, and fell asleep.

金金金The picture book was truly interesting, yet what intrigued the girl most was that even though there was only one book, the story changed every time. One day, the people and animals that Noel met changed, and so did the locales; one time Noel even defeated a horrific demon. From what she was allowed to touch, the book didn’t feel thick enough for all that.

金金金Whatever the story was, they all had one thing in common. No matter what, there was always a happy ending. The girl could always listen with peace of mind, after all, sad stories were tedious to hear.

金金金The most fascinating thing was Noel’s crow friend flying towards the sun in one story. Just when it was almost at the sun, it became wreathed in flames, and cooked to death. Shortly after dying in the flames, the crow became a

star in the sky. In her heart she was a little jealous of the crow because of how, despite no longer having a body, it was able to remain by the warm rays of the sun. She was sure that the crow found happiness. To those words, number 150 made a confused noise. That line of thinking wasn't normal.

金金金One evening, the girl was so curious she asked, "How can only one picture book, always have a different story in it?"

"… That's because… it's a mysterious book. Whenever I begin to read it, it generates a new story. It sure is an amazing book," number 150 smiled as she replied.

金金金The girl was about to praise what an amazing treasure the book was, but stopped herself when she noticed that number 150's face looked sad somehow. She wanted to know why that was, but couldn't know because she couldn't see her face too well. Each time she was read the story, the girl began to embrace her one dream. Like Noel the cat, she wanted to find her own happiness. She asked number 150 how to find happiness.

"I don't really know either. However, if we live long enough to get out of this place, let's search for it together," and their small forms hugged.

金金金The girl whispered, with a strong nod, "It's a promise," and number 150 weakly smiled. On the following day, number 150 died. When she tried to wake her up in the morning, she found number 150's body had already gone cold. No matter how many times she shook her, number 150's eyes wouldn't open. When she rushed to the teachers, she heard that recently, number 150 hadn't been eating any of her food.

"It's your fault. You made her drink that strange black stuff."

"… No experiment can escape failure. Sometimes, sacrifices must be made for the greater good."

"… … … You should have died then…"

"……"

金金金The girl glared at him with the intent to kill. She expected to be beaten as usual, but her teacher left without a word.

金金金That night, while heading to the toilet, from a room leaking light under the door, she heard a voice.

"His Majesty wants a full report on the experiment and an official investigation. As auditor, I will issue the report."

"I'll resubmit mine, so you don't have to worry about that."

"I want to know why you keep interfering with my report. This is obviously an abuse of power."

"Don't say that; we are on schedule so I know the report will be favourable."

"It's going well? Don't make me laugh. These past few months, the number of deaths increased dramatically. Oh, but on the other hand, you do have some pretty *mortifying* results!"

"I'm afraid we simply don't agree, auditor. My Daybreak is very much on schedule. His Majesty's expectations will not be betrayed. If we leverage what we have, we can easily meet our next target."

"I'm sorry, but that's probably impossible. I might not notice some falsifications in a brief examination, but one of your subordinates provided evidence."

"… I'm sorry, but we don't need to keep you any longer. This is the end of your wanton meddling."

“You’re wasting the lives of these children, and besides, deception of His Majesty must end. You will accept full responsibility for this.”

“Don’t think you can get away from this, o hypocrite. You bastards are the same as we are. How many children have had their lives snatched away here? You would deal them the finishing blow by make their sacrifices meaningless, so I can’t understand your logic. No matter what you do, no matter who you ask, they will all tell you the experiment must be completed.”

“Either way, you are under arrest. Please don’t resist, or violent means will…”

“… My Daybreak, my wonderful plan won’t be interrupted at this late a stage!”

金金金Although his angry voice was audible from the teachers’ rooms, none of them responded. A storm of sounds followed, then the sound of something shattering, all followed by several screams, until finally, the sounds ceased.

…

金金金In order to never forget number 150, the girl kept her picture book as a memento. It was an important treasure that she intended to never lose. As long as she had it, number 150 would live on in her mind. Nothing would be washed away in the rain.

金金金That said, for some time after, the girl didn’t have the spirit to get anything done. It was the most painful thing that had happened to her in her life. She no longer had a friend to read to her every night, and she could no longer share in her laughter. However, she had no intentions of abandoning her promise to number 150; the promise that number 150 couldn’t keep. If Noel the cat experienced troubles when unable to fulfill a promise, the girl resolved to protect her promise with number 150. Before she could search for happiness in the outside world, however, she first needed to leave her familiar surroundings.

金金金At every opportunity she asked the teachers, garrisoned soldiers, and even the other children, “How does one find happiness?”

金金金The other children didn’t really know, and were easily stumped. The teachers put on airs, and claimed that, “If you devote yourself to His Majesty, only blessings will befall you,” and, “When Operation Daybreak is completed, you will be able to walk about with great pride.”

金金金What a useless bunch, the girl thought, but still politely nodded to their answers. She had no time to ponder it all in her room for it happened to be a busy time.

金金金Regardless of how many interesting stories she heard, none of the other children knew the answer to her question. What she did find though, was that many of them were willing to share her aspiration.

“If I were to head out, I’d surely want to seek happiness together. If it’s okay with you, would it be alright if I accompanied you?”

金金金After the number 8 boy said that, many of the other children followed suit as they began to flock to the girl who accepted them all with a smile. No matter how many companions joined her, she never became annoyed. She handled the situation with positivity. Their numbers eventually faded to 50, but those children who stayed with her became true comrades. From her heart, the girl was truly grateful.

金金金The final day arrived: the day when the experiment came to an end, the surviving children were to receive names in His Majesty’s honour. The number 8 boy, with a desperation for survival, clasped her hand. Of course, she nodded affirmatively. Looking out, all of the other students were assuring those around them as well.

“Attention all! Until today you have endured well. The final stage of Operation Daybreak is finally to be executed.

Those who survive this final test, will be the rare few who transcend their humanity. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to call those who survive this: the embodiment of the sun," with an exhausted face, the teacher began his speech.

金金金She didn't know when the teacher had become so worn out. At first there had been many, but now there was only him. His face was ragged, and his hair was unkempt. His eyes were hollow, and his musculature had waned to the point of skin and bone. His robe that was once spotlessly white, now was stained here and there in a vivid vermilion.

"Operation Daybreak is not a failure. Don't let the sacrifices of your brothers and sisters up until today be wasted; you must survive. My… my plan was not a failure, and you are the testament to this truth. My Daybreak has come!"

金金金The teacher, in his excitement, poured a glass of the black fluid. It was still an incomparable black; the truest darkness to the point where it was clearly visible, even to the girl whose eyesight had continued to dwindle.

"Finally, I shall accompany you all in a toast. With a common spirit I dedicate this to the 'blood of the sun', and it is my greatest honour to receive this taste firsthand."

金金金The teacher, twisting his face into a grin, raised the stagnant glass. The children too raised their glasses.

"In celebration of the success of Operation Daybreak, and to pray for further honour to the Horsheido Empire… We Drink!"

金金金The teacher was the first to drink, his eyes were closed in preparation, and likewise, the children followed suit. The girl muttered a delayed 'cheers', and begrudgingly drank, telling herself that it would be the for the last time. On the verge of freedom, she endured.

"… ah…"

金金金The reason why she didn't want to drink it immediately became apparent. She felt a burning in her stomach, and shortly thereafter, not only her stomach, but her whole body began to burn. The teacher had fallen face down, and was screaming in agony. The children too, had all collapsed. The girl had also tried to scream, but the pain was so great, no noise came out. She coughed up something red, and mysterious fluids were running from her eyes and nose.

金金金She heard a loud noise, and before her eyes, a red flame flourished. It was different from the sun's rays, and wasn't pleasant at all.

金金金Nobody understood what was happening, but it was instantly apparent to the girl. It felt like the end. She sensed death looming over them as her consciousness faded. Before her darkness fell, a dark red something ——had lightning like flashes, but the girls senses were already too dull to fully comprehend.

金金金With a hint of something cold pressing against her cheek, the girl's eyes opened. The area was pitch black, and she didn't know where she was. An earsplitting sound of buzzing, and dripping water could be heard. While trying to move, there was something soft, and something hard frustrating her attempts. Since there was no other way, she shoved them as far as she could, and crawled under them towards a dim light. Something stuck to her hand, and made a disconcerting noise. Like an ant crawling from its nest, she somehow slipped out of wherever she had been. While breathing heavily, she dropped down from exhaustion on the spot.

金金金In heavy rain, the ground had become muddy, and sharp rocks bit painfully into her flesh. Freezing rain pounded from on high, stealing her body's heat. For the moment she stood up to evade the rain, and when surveying the surroundings, she found out exactly where she was. What she had crawled from wasn't just a hole. It was a grave, and it wasn't the only one as others dotted the nearby landscape.

金金金At first she didn't understand, but in the hole were several corpses. Looking closely, she saw several familiar

faces.

金金金Were the children from the church buried here?

金金金Old corpses became skeletons, but the fresh ones hadn't yet lost their original forms. The pile of bodies was riddled with maggots, and the buzzing sound she'd heard was from the adult flies.

"…"

金金金The girl was frightened, and stepping back, her foot got caught in another grave. At the feeling of something squishy, she involuntarily jumped. What she had stepped on was the body of a female child. The face was half collapsed, but she had seen it before; it was number 150.

金金金The only face she could clearly recognize was number 150's because of how close they were. It didn't go well when she lifted her foot as some of the corpse's flesh peeled off of its left arm. It was a gooey chunk of her hand and skin and it carried with it an eery feeling, but she couldn't bring herself to brush it off.

"It looks like we aren't leaving together," the girl muttered as she brushed off the hand which, crumbled away.

金金金Warm liquid overflowed from the girl's eyes.

金金金I'm going to find the happiness you couldn't.

金金金Having thought that, the girl prayed by the grave while weeping. She screamed, and cried, and cried some more. Her weeping voice was lost in the violent rain.

金金金Crying until it hurt, the girl once again regained her senses. She looked again to her surroundings. Wiping the rain off her face, she stood.

"I survived. I'm the only one to survive."

金金金The crying girl laughed. Her feelings had exceeded those of terror and grief, and a different mood rose in her. It was joy.

金金金I survived to search for the way to achieve happiness; to keep everyone's promise. I am the only one who can now.

"……"

金金金From her breast, she lifted her most important picture book. The rain and soil had caused it to become tattered. She looked at number 150's corpse. Rather than leaving the book there, she felt it would be better to bring it with her.

"… Name. What do I do about a name?"

金金金When she'd survived, her teacher was supposed to give her a name; however, the last teacher had probably died himself, not that it mattered. She wasn't sad for him at all. She couldn't forgive anyone who would abandon to the grave, a girl who wasn't dead.

金金金People who can't keep their word are trash, so their words don't hold any sway over me. Who would work for His Majesty anyway?

金金金The girl shouted from the bottom of her stomach.

金金金After crying some more, the girl lay down by the graves, and while covered in mud, thought about what her

name should be.

“Noel?”

金金金The girl opened number 150’s picture book. Although blurred, the image of a hat wearing cat remained barely visible.

“Noel. … That’s it, I’ll go with Noel. My name is, from today onwards: Noel.”

金金金The girl named herself Noel. The hat wearing, strange named, cat had traveled to many places, and always found a happy ending. The girl strongly felt that: *Like Noel, I want to find my own happiness.*

金金金I’m not number 13 anymore. I’m Noel.

金金金With a nod, she scooped up mud in both hands, and reburied her friends. It would have been in poor taste to leave the bodies exposed in a field, but not only that, she did it for those who had been good companions. In the time it took her to finish the job, the rain had stopped, and in its place, Noel’s beloved round sun rose in the sky.

金金金The tired Noel, in the warmth of the sun, decided to sleep on the spot.

“Clear weather days really are my favourite. After all, it warms the body and soul, so I’m sure that everyone appreciates it.”

金金金While Noel was quietly smiling, she slowly closed her eyes.

金金金I’ll search for a way to become happy, and show them all my peaceful heart. Then they can rest in peace. Please hang in there just a little while longer.
金金金However many times she repeated it, when she finally slept, Noel was at peace.

Translator’s Note:

This is the first translation I’ve ever done, if it somehow managed to be significantly different from the original, please let me know, because it wasn’t intentional.

Editor’s Note:

Since I am lazy, I decided that instead of simply changing the text colour to black overall, I would manually change the text colour of each paragraph to black. After an hour of copying and pasting, I realised that this was most likely, the least efficient way of handling this problem. I have no regrets.

< Previous Chapter | Index | Next Chapter >

Chapter 2: Rebels of the Red Circle

“Hey, Noel, it’s about time we head back!”

金金金After shouldering his weapon the young man surveyed the area, and called out in a loud voice. Today was the same as always, he hunted vigorously from dawn till dusk. His name was Mirut, and helping him were his fellow hunters Fraser and Noel. Fraser was wiping his sweat while resting on a nearby stump.

“What, already done? And there are still tons of game left. It’s kind of a shame, you know,” somewhere above the tree line a dissatisfied voice could be heard.

“Today’s earnings are already too much. It’s no good to be so greedy, anyway just get down from there already.”

“Right, I get it.”

金金金Before Mirut’s eyes Noel elegantly jumped down and landed amongst the corpses of countless small animals that were strewn about on the forest floor. Each animal had an arrow brilliantly protruding from one of its various vital organs.

“Impressive as always. That’s some monstrous skill.”

“I don’t even like bows though, without arrows it’s impossible to fight.”

金金金Mirut had nothing to gain by responding. Even a skilled hunter couldn’t replicate her consistent results, let alone the fledglings Mirut and Fraser. He didn’t want to hear someone as skilled as she was say that it wasn’t even her specialty.

“Oi, wait. I thought we were going to take down a small boar together. If it’s like this, isn’t it as though you’re the best one?”

金金金Fraser poked the dead boar. Since it was small, there wouldn’t been much praise.

“Come on, isn’t it amazing?”

“Oh yea, it’s amazing. Totally amazing. You’re amazing.”

“All right! I’ll take it.”

金金金Innocently smiling, Noel tossed some berries to Fraser for the complement.

“Oh thanks. …shit, this is as sour as ever,” Fraser scowled as he chewed the seeds.

金金金Complaining about being hot, Noel began to loosen the top of her shirt. Mirut felt his gaze begin to drift while Fraser was happily enjoying the view.

金金金*She’s always the same. Don’t you have any awareness of yourself as a woman?*

金金金Irritated by her defenselessness, Mirut tossed a cloth over her to cover it up, and Fraser quietly clicked his tongue.

“… You could catch a cold, so wipe your sweat. Go on.”

“Okay.”

金金金After sorting out her breast, she moved on to wiping her hair. Mirut was fascinated by her ruffled, gently swaying, fiery red hair. It was mysteriously captivating.

“Thanks for that, here’s the towel back. Well then, let’s head back and eat some food! Good food and rest are the first steps to happiness right?”

金金金Noel took a notebook from her breast pocket to confirm her suspicions. It was one of her treasures: the happiness memo. It didn’t matter whom she asked, every detail of every method to find happiness was written down. Whatever she didn’t think would work out was crossed off with a diagonal line. She always put in a great deal of effort, but still hadn’t made much progress; she lamented each time a method had failed to succeed in practice.

“That’s how it is. All right then, let’s head back. Fraser, gather up the game.”

“Right. With just this much, we’ll eat a feast today!”

“Well, good luck boys.”

“You help too. Get the rope out of that bag.”

“Okay, I get it.”

金金金They fastened their prey to wooden poles for the journey back. The mountainous region created an environment in which very few agricultural crops could grow, so the village populations were instead sustained by what the hunters brought back each day. That dependence on hunters was what allowed Noel to reside in the village. Their food surplus wasn’t great enough to support useless individuals, thus forcing men and women of all ages to work hard every day in order to scrape by.

金金金The people were frustrated by heavy taxes. Even though they worked their hardest, a life of comfort was out of reach. Most of the harvest was stored for sale in the nearby town, and the rest of it was levied as tax. With a life expectancy of only several decades, their continued existence slowly caused their thoughts and moods to darken. There was even a rumor that a rebellion had started.

金金金Despite all this, the people never thought to take up their swords. They had neither the will, nor the means to effectively rebel. In the village’s dilapidated bar, good friends complained to each other with all of their remaining energy. In that stagnated, dwindling mundanity, an optimistic girl had suddenly materialized. With oversized clothes like those of a peddler and a bident on her back, she appeared with a full faced smile.

金金金For a small village, it was a serious affair. The village elder called everyone together for a discussion on what to do. Noel told them her circumstances, but since she was alone there was no easy way to confirm her story. That being the case, she boasted that she could do anything they could while thumping her chest. The elder had never before heard such shocking words, but they eventually became something that had to accepted. Noel was approximately 16, and since she was both young and attractive if she turned out to be useless, they had planned to sell her off. It wasn’t surprising when some of that sentiment lingered in the village; however, the villagers’ children didn’t concur. Against all expectations, Noel was granted permanent residence. She found a home within a withering old building, and quickly began a life as a clever hunter. With the old bow, and few arrows that Mirut had lent her, she showed them the contents of what she had hunted in the mountains.

金金金Her productivity was comparable to what the village’s most skilled hunter could do in 3 days time, and if she continued to hunt at that rate, it would harm the ecosystem, so she had to give the animals a “head start”. That was how she became a fully fledged member of Zoim Village.

“Hey, why are you so good at hunting? What’s your secret? Maybe some kind of trick to spotting the hidden

animals?”

“Not really. I just… know, you know? I can tell where they hide, and where to shoot to bring down a bird. Wait, aren’t I amazing?”

“You are, it’s truly incredible. If you get it, how about giving me a hand?”

“Ha一, this one’s the type with inborn talent you know. Isn’t it enviable? If you got her as a wife, you wouldn’t have to worry about food for the rest of your life.”

“I don’t know about that…”

“It’s totally true, there’s no mistaking it.”

While Fraser was making jokes, Noel had a clueless expression, and like that Fraser continued on, “… Hey, about what I was saying earlier, isn’t it about time you started thinking about that?”

“That being who I’ll marry?”

“Yeah, that. I said that seriously, so what about it? I’ll say this now, but I’m serious.”

金金金Fraser enquired with an unusually serious look. Noel was the number one choice for most of the young men in the village. Her looks were outstanding, and her hunting skill was unparalleled. Already, many of them had fallen for her charms. The one who gained her as a wife would gain considerable status in the village, but that wasn’t something that she was going to notice on her own. She had a total lack of the “femininity” common to others of her age.

“No, I appreciate the sentiment, but can you stop?”

“But, why not?”

“Well, I don’t know if the marriage will stop me from finding happiness. The women of the village were seriously complaining about their own marriages you know.”

She pulled out her happiness memo to confirm. Peeking at it from the side, Fraser could see that the marriage entry had unfortunately been crossed out.

“Don’t listen to those disgruntled old women. It’ll be fine if it’s me, and we’ll definitely find happiness!” Fraser countered vehemently.

金金金He’d checked to make sure he was truly in love, and amongst the girls in the village, there had only been one conclusion.

“Who I like, and those kinds of questions, are things I have absolutely no idea of the answer to. There isn’t really anyone I want to live with right now, so could you hold off on asking me for a bit?” Noel smiled while clearly rejecting him.

金金金*She’s that kind of woman, I guess. Totally different from the others. I have no idea what she’s thinking.*

金金金She was usually aloof and lighthearted, but sometimes her expression changed. From time to time a darkness would show through her cheerful demeanor. It was most distinguished on rainy days. During the nights that followed, it was as though she’d been possessed by another, more gloomy, personality to the point where it became difficult to speak to her.

金金金It once rained heavily for a day, and during the night that followed, a drunken hooligan had tried stealing into

Noel's bed. He then ran to the village elder in fear of retaliation, even though he knew there were ramifications for what he had attempted. He drew a picture of what had scared him, and after some time, the figure of Noel could be made out. It now felt as though his tale had been the drink speaking; however, the morning after the incident, the man had been found half-dead, and sprawled out in the village square. It had been so bad that it hurt to look at, and since then, the man had avoided Noel as much as possible. He had the eyes of a frightened dog, and after being driven from the village, no one knew what befell him.

金金金Fraser was well aware of this, and so he made himself clear. Mirut sighed to himself, as he was unconsciously upset.

金金金While they were heading down the mountain to return to the village, a tall young man called out to them. The lanky, docile man was named Kraft. He rose from working the field with a hoe in his hands.

"Hey guys!"

"What is it Kraft? If you stand around there, we won't have any food."

金金金Fraser clapped him on the back. Their personalities, polar opposites, but they clearly got along fine somehow.

"It's not like that. It was so noisy in the village. I think something happened."

"We'll find out soon enough."

"But, what if bandits attacked?"

金金金It wasn't rare for bandit clans to attack the village. The villagers worked together to defend themselves in their own way. They would obediently hand over their money to avoid unnecessary casualties when confronted with a large company of bandits; however, if the bandits were few in number the villagers would quickly reverse the situation and reappropriate their belongings instead.

"Wow, it really is noisy, eh. Yup, maybe it's a festival. Festivals are always fun right?"

金金金Noel was as optimistic as ever.

"Any way you look at it, there's no way a festival would happen this time of year."

"Festivals are fun, right? There will be tons of lovely treats to eat. There will be drums, and flutes, and it'll be interesting. I did some practicing, so I'm pretty good at…"

"Now is not the time for your positive interpretations. Look at the flames billowing into the sky!"

"Oi, what!?"

金金金Fraser and Kraft's faces went pale. From the direction of Zoim Village rose black smoke. There weren't any bandit clans that would resort to arsony in the surrounding area, as that would diminish their future earnings; however, it was still possible that a new band was passing through.

"W-w-what do we do? Hey, Fraser, we… what direction should we run in?"

"Don't fuck with me! We can't just abandon our people you dumbass!" Fraser swatted Kraft in the back of the head.

金金金Naturally, Mirut was of the same opinion. He had no intentions of sacrificing his family. Either of them would have tried to help, even if it meant going alone.

"Okay, it's about time we headed back then. I can tell from your words you have good intentions."

“Noel, y-you too? If those bandits are a violent bunch, you might be killed.”

“You don’t have to worry, I’ll be okay. I’ll just kill everything that gets in my way. Otherwise things would get way too out of hand.”

金金金As she grasped the bident on her back in her right hand, Noel’s smiling face let out a short laugh. Kraft was left speechless at the sight. He almost couldn’t believe in what he was seeing. There was no way that a bunch of peasant farmers, and hunters could take on an organized bandit group; only if the ones in question were normal.

金金金*This stupid woman is seriously going to fight them? It’s like she doesn’t realize the difference between humans and animals.*

金金金Humans don’t think like animals, they are not so easily hunted. He’d never killed people before, but even Mirut knew that much. To top it all off, despite Noel’s skill with a bow, she chose to use a spear; her skill with which had never been confirmed. While she’d always carried it on her, it hadn’t ever been useful during a hunt, and overcoming such a difficult situation wasn’t a joke.

“Noel. We don’t know who we’re up against just yet. We can’t let this get out of hand. You might be able to recklessly die out there without worries, but those of us with families absolutely can’t get involved right now.”

“Right, I get it.”

“Oh really?”

“Yes, I understand.”

金金金Noel curled her right hand into a fist in front of her chest in a military style salute. She over-exaggerated the movement in a joking fashion, but then her back straightened out, and her expression became serious. She no longer appeared to be a hunter, and instead looked like a professional soldier.

“… A-am I doing it right?”

“Ah, should I do it too?”

金金金Making eye contact with each other, Fraser and Kurt mimicked her. Even without pointing it out, the differences between them were clear.

“Why don’t we all just fool around then!? Look, if you’re going to say something stupid, just leave.”

金金金Mirut then started towards the village while shrugging his shoulders.

金金金Upon reaching to the village, they found many men with red cloths wrapped around their arms. It didn’t seem as though any looting had occurred, and the sound of screams was totally absent. From the elder’s house, which towered over the village, the usual flag was hanging at a different angle. However, they did not understand why the flag now consisted of two red, diagonal lines displayed on a field of white.

“Fraser, you’re safe!”

“Uh, yeah, but what’s all this?”

“I don’t really know either. Suddenly, so many of them appeared.”

金金金Fraser had confirmed his mother’s safety, but Mirut was still searching for his only remaining family member. When his eyes met with the one he was after, they rushed to each other.

“Onii-chan!”

“Cal! They didn’t do anything to you did they?”

“No, but it was scary.”

“It’s all right now. Onii-chan is here.”

金金金Mirut hugged Cal, who finally showed a smiling face.

“You seem so happy that I’m a little jealous. Hey, can you create families without getting married?” Noel asked something ridiculous as she pulled out her memo.

金金金She closed in on the defenseless face, but was waved away by a hand.

“Oi, wait. What’s the situation? It’s nice you’re happy and all, but this might be seriously bad.”

“Yup. The village has been occupied by some unknown people after all.”

金金金Noel understood, and nodded firmly.

“If you understand, behave yourself!”

金金金Mirut left the tomfoolery to the others, and headed off to observe the bandit-like men who had come to the village. Each of them had a red cloth wrapped around his arm, and they were all armed with spears, swords, and the like. Their outfits were tattered, and they lacked a sense of unity. They were also disproportionately mixed, and seemed to foster a wider spread of demographics than the usual roaming bands of ruffians.

“But still, who are these guys? They seem somehow different from raiders.”

“They seem kind of mish-mashed. Look at that guy, he’s holding a bamboo broom. Do you think he’s using it as a weapon?” Noel hurriedly pointed out.

“If you’re so loud, we’ll stand out.”

“Nobody heard, and we haven’t been spotted yet.”

“It’s still a problem even if the chances of them noticing are 10 000 to 1.”

“I guess so.”

金金金While that was happening, one man stepped forth from the group. Different from the others, his figure was a size larger, and his equipment was of a higher quality. Rather than a bandit, he had the demeanor of a seasoned mercenary. He was distinguishable at a glance. The boisterous lot went silent the instant he called for it. The man who represented them surveyed his surroundings, and spoke in a great, resonating voice.

“We are the ones who arose in opposition of the Viceroy of Coimbra, Grohl Wardka and his oppressive regime; we are the army of the Red Circle!”

“Eh, the … army of the Red Circle?”

金金金The village elder asked while bowing, and Ristih nodded.

“That is correct. They call me Ristih, and I serve as the head of the Red Circle’s army. We have shed much blood before this point. To remember this, we rap a red cloth around our right arms. We carve our red wheels from the flags of our foes, and covet the readiness to hand down judgement on the ones we oppose!”

“I-I see…”

“Our Red Circle army aims to take the capital by sweeping down from North Coimbra, and we do nothing less than work towards our destiny each and every day. Our efforts are proof of the gross tyranny of the despotic Grohl. By now our exploits should have made themselves known to the Emperor himself! When that happens, the maggots in charge will receive their just rewards.”

金金金Unlike the prideful, assertive Ristih, the village elder had only become perplexed. If what he said was true, then the secluded village was entirely unrelated. The only time that politics ever mattered there was when the tax collectors made their rounds, or when the military enlisted the young men.

金金金Mirut had the feeling he knew where this was going, but he stayed silent. He kept his eyes peeled in case it was to happen. Noel, meanwhile, had her eyes closed. From time to time, her body tottered such that Mirut thought she might actually have been sleeping. He wanted her to be more cautious, but remained silent because he didn’t want to cause a disturbance. Cal was holding Noel up with both hands from behind. Mirut’s little sister was very attached to the carefree Noel.

“What do you want with this atrite village? Despite our hospitality, our stockpiles are paltry.”

“Among brethren, such extortion is unthinkable. Were we to do such things, we’d be no better than the ones we fight. We only have one request. We simply would ask that those of a mind with us step forward and join our cause. Anybody can help, for without such support, we wouldn’t be able to change anything. We’ll accept those willing to take up their swords, for now is their time!”

“Basically, you want us to take up arms in revolt against the Coimbra administration.”

To the concerned elder’s further wrinkling brow, Ristih sharply pronounced, “Put simply, yes. However, we have no intentions of opposing His Imperial Majesty, or the empire at large. Our only goal is to remove the parasites from their leadership over Coimbra. Never shall our noble cause be misconstrued as treason!”

金金金In case they were refused, the soldiers spread out in preparation for looting. Although the rebel leader had promised not to kill anybody, there had been a strong emphasis on how other people had generously supplied them. Rebellion, however, was still a serious crime. If the village provided support and the rebellion was a failure, they would surely meet with a tragic fate. The elder hesitated for some time, before capitulating with a helpless expression.

“I understand. Some of our young will participate, so please show mercy.”

“I’m grateful. To go forth in opposition of the misdeeds of the Grohl, and live our lives for the betterment of the people is our mission. Elder, we will be sure to prove your judgement to be correct!” Ristih exclaimed before mounting his horse.

金金金With those heavy words the cavalry advanced, and the rest of the Red Circle army began to march in a loose formation. They had only been the vanguard of the rebel army and the remaining corps were to arrive later. With so many people arriving, maintaining order was becoming an impossibility. While Mirut was thinking about such things, the elder trudged back to the villagers with his shoulders stooped.

“Everyone, it’s as you’ve heard; I won’t force you to comply. Unfortunately, more soldiers will be passing through.”

“What!? What could they fix, rebellion is a serious matter! If we lose our workers we’ll lose our lives!”

“Even so, our village would have been destroyed had we not allowed this. Is there anyone who could have made a better choice!?”

“Elder, what if we secretly informed the military?”

“There is no way they wouldn’t notice. They might pretend not to, but they know. If we did that, by the time help arrived from the south, we’d already be dead. I had no choice. I understand it will be hard to survive, but survive we must.”

金金金The elder let out a quivering voice while lowering his head. No voices of opposition arose. Even with the current situation, their village wasn’t one that the national army would attempt to protect, instead, they would probably wait and see how it all played out. It was true that the people harboured resentment towards the Grohls’ rule. There would likely be a few who would wish to improve things by participating in the revolt. If the army enlisted soldiers from fellow northerners who also suffered from poverty, they wouldn’t have a strong will to destroy the rebellion, but rather feel that the rebels were a mouthpiece for their own complaints as well.

金金金The elder who had made up his mind, and those who were in agreeance with him gathered together and spoke in an uproar. They were discussing who to send off with the rebels. The participants began to focus on Mirut and the hunters, and eventually turned their gazes to Kraft and the farmers as well. In total, ten were called. Of course Noel was chosen as well. In such times it was a given to offer up the strangers and second sons.

“Hey, could everyone listen for a bit?”

“What?”

Noel turned to them all with a serious face, and spoke up,“Uh, well, I say it’d be better if you collected your families, and fled to somewhere safe.”

“… what’s that supposed to mean?”

“I agree with her. Why is it that we aren’t allowed to tell others to run away with their families? Do we have to join the army of the Red Circle?”

金金金Kraft tilted his head in curiosity. The others were also making puzzled expressions. It was only natural that they were supposed to join so that the village could avert destruction. It was also ridiculous to assume they would fight for an army that had taken them away from their families. Neither Cal, nor Fraser’s mother could defend themselves; without help they would die.

“Yupyup, and somehow, I get the feeling that at this rate, once we’ve left the remaining troops might just pillage anyway.”

“——eh?”

“Oi, wait. That kind of retarded thing couldn’t possibly happen!”

金金金Fraser may have shouted, but Noel didn’t care for what he had to say.

“Well, even if it’s been stated by the Army of the Red Circle, they’re pretty disorganised. They are more like roaming bandits than a well disciplined military corps.”

“But…”

“In order that you don’t regret anything, I recommend fleeing with your loved ones. Not that I’m forcing you or anything…”

金金金As Noel spoke, she grabbed Cal’s hand and began to walk.

“Hey! What are you doing with Cal!?” Mirut began to shout, and Noel smiled gently at him.

“Cal’s my friend, so I’ll protect her. Right?”

“Thank you Noel-chan!”

“Yup. Ah, do you want to read my picture book together? It always has a new story in it, so you’d better prepare for whatever kind of story we’ll discover.”

“I do! Make sure you’re ready too, okay!”

“Hey, stop! Don’t just do things like that!”

金金金While standing there Mirut was hesitant. Taking his sister despite usually not thinking much, Noel’s words did hold some truth. He was unsure of what to do.

金金金*Damn, what do I do!?*

“That’s a pretty amusing face, Mirut. Looks like you just ate something sour. Hey, it’s fine if I laugh right?”

金金金Noel had a habit of asking permission to do things after she had started, and this time was no different. Mirut was so frustrated he simply shouted, “Shut up! I’m thinking so stop!”

“Okay, I get it.”

金金金Noel again saluted in perfect form; however, the smile on her face hadn’t vanished. It was as though she couldn’t understand the gravity of the situation she was in. He found himself unable to come to a conclusion. He needed to stop focusing on Noel’s antics, and to refocus on the task at hand.

金金金*We could probably head towards the southern Rockbell district. We’d also have to make sure to escape at an appropriate time. At any rate, it would be best to keep this hidden from the other villagers.*

金金金Following the highway south would bring them from Zoim village to the Rockbell district which was halfway between the northern and southern regions. The area was relatively large such that the rebel army couldn’t possibly comb its entirety.

“Alright, I guess I’ll go talk to the elder. What Noel’s saying might not be impossible, I think.”

“It’s true that we won’t know what’ll happen, eh? That Ristih guy’s story’s suspicious too. We can’t trust him for now.”

“Is it like that then? He seemed like a pretty diligent guy to me.”

“Life’s not so easy that you can tell between good and bad just by looks.”

金金金Fraser brushed those words aside as nonsense, and Mirut was of the same opinion. Ristih had claimed to be frantically fighting the tyranny, but it seemed only superficial. They didn’t seem desperate at all, and their actions so far hadn’t been ones that the poor would readily support.

“But, the surrounding villages have probably had this happen. W-what should we do?”

金金金Kraft’s large body was shaking. Despite his imposing build, Kraft had less spirit than most. Mirut knew Kraft was beyond help, and offered some advice. He was the type who had to help the people that he knew.

“For now we’ll hide ourselves in the mountains. We won’t have to worry about food if we stay at the hunting shack. We should be able to last for some time.”

“That’s it! You’re so smart Mirut. I’ll get my dad and mum now!”

“I will too.”

金金金Several others followed after the gangly Kraft.

“Noel, I’m sorry, but can you look after Cal until I get back. I’m counting on you to protect her.”

“Okay, I’ll do that.”

金金金Noel nodded in affirmation, and turned to face the elder’s underlings. It was reckless to keep the little sister who had just recently turned ten, for she could easily become a burden during their escape. They planned on leaving as soon as Mirut returned. If it was only a small group that ran, it would take some time before the other villagers noticed people were missing.

“Sorry, but it looks like I’m in charge of babysitting. Think it’s time for the picture book? Somehow, it seems like it.”

“It’ll be okay when we’re out of the village. Such a special thing should be read a time when we can fully appreciate it. We can’t let it go to waste, right?” at Cal’s nervous words, Noel smiled.

“Noel-oneechan, aren’t you scared? Even though all of the people here are panicking?”

“I guess I’m not scared at all right now. I mean, it isn’t even raining, and the weather is great.”

金金金Noel raised her gaze to the sky. The sun’s form was absent, but in its place, a half-moon illuminated the world.

“It’s all right if it isn’t raining?”

“Yup. Falling rain heralds rising horrors. It has always been that way… Rainy days are full of bad things.”

金金金Noel spat in irritation.

“Rainy days do get you down. You’re always smiling on sunny days, but on rainy ones you make a really scary face.”

“Clear skies have only good news. Aa—h, I wish it would always be cloudless.”

金金金The sun brought energy to Noel, and her prided hair shared its colour. She had been anointed by sunlight upon choosing her name. The moon and stars set her heart at ease; their lazy, shimmering light brought down an easy mood which was good for sleeping. So it was that Noel extolled such cloudless days.

“But, wouldn’t the crops all die?”

“… Yup, that’s true.”

“See, see, rain is important. When it rains, we don’t need to water the fields!”

金金金While listening to Cal’s words, Noel remembered that day; the hellish scene she had failed to push from her mind: the putrid smell that assailed her nose, the harsh buzzing of the flies, the hole packed with haplessly abandoned corpses, and the lifeless bodies of her precious friends. Such was the end of those unable to find happiness; blanketed by a cold rain that veiled the world. She came to hate the rain, and she felt her existence chip away with every drop.

“Even so, I still don’t like the rain. In fact, I hate it.”

Translator’s Note:

The astute reader may have noticed “eh” being used in this translation. I am using the Canadian eh because it is moderately similar to the Japanese ねぇ at the end of a sentence and that amuses me greatly. Obviously I only use it when it seems appropriate, rather than at every opportunity. Maybe I’ve spent too much time with LING majors…

The rumor of rebellion was probably Fraser thinking to himself and included an “I don’t really know though,” but it seemed really out of place so it was moved.

Editor’s Note:

One day, I will finally complete my genocide of the Suspicions.

< Previous Chapter | Index | Next Chapter >

PsychoBarcodeTranslations

金金金It had only been a century since King Bergis Wardka had led the northern mountain kingdom of Horsheido to fully conquer the continent of Libelika; it was the first time that the continent had ever been truly unified. Horsheido had humble beginnings, but had begun to quickly amass power, and with its preparations complete, it began its advance on the south. It swept through the south as though to vent the rage that had built up due to years of marginalisation. The soldiers of Horsheido displayed inhuman prowess in battle, crushing all those who stood in their way without exception. Because they were fully devoted to conquering any disputed territory, their weaker neighbours fell before the unstoppable might of the Horsheido military as unparalleled campaign completely annexed the entirety of the Libelika continent.

金金金The Bergis unification had the capital city of Ferdos built in the most fertile land in the east, and divided the rest of the continent into 12 provinces for ease of rule. The kingdom of Horsheido became an empire, with Bergis its founding father.

金金金Bergis deployed his skilled retainers and blood relatives to maintain order in the provinces, allowing them discretionary authority, and assigning only loose guidelines and vague directives. There were those who advised against such a diffusion of power, but Bergis quickly and decisively acted upon his carefully considered plans. His judgement eventually proved to be correct when several rebellions had quickly been suppressed. The chosen viceroys surpassed all expectations in governing ability, and they oversaw well thought out projects that became the cornerstones of the empire. So long as a relationship of trust was maintained between the emperor and his viceroys, they were able to respond quickly to any situation, and it proved to be an administration that had no gaps within its grasp.

金金金The strict adherence to a social policy of “Generosity to the subdued, severity to the disobedient,” and its widespread adoption incentivised the rulers of each province take up their swords, and fall in line with the rest of the empire. When a former enemy was appointed viceroy of the Ribeldam province, it proved that those with ability would rise to prominence regardless of their background. With his numerous accomplishments, Bergis became known as “the Emperor of the Sun,” and he died maintaining overwhelming support from vassals, and plebeians alike.

金金金The end of a great ruler was usually followed by a struggle for succession, and Horsheido was no exception. The infighting, however, did little to shake the foundations from which the empire had been constructed. A second generation emperor successfully succeeded the throne, and continuing through to the third generation emperor Befnam, a great focus was placed upon maintaining stability which led to an era of peace and tranquility.

金金金Despite the calmness of the times, irregular circumstances existed; the foremost example of which resided in the southwestern province of Coimbra. Having once been a well known trading centre, the emblem on its flag was a balance scale. It had great lengths of coast, and its mountainous northern regions boasted many lucrative gold mines. The famous mines brought prosperity to the province, and only ten years earlier it had been one of the most affluent provinces on the entire continent.

金金金Through trade with the peoples of the southern islands, spices, oceanic produce, and jewelry had been brought to Coimbra. The ensuing cultural exchange had breathed new life into the entire continent. Luxuries like opera became so prevalent in Coimbra that many began to see such things as a symbol of the province. Most lucrative of all was their trade with the western continent of Mundonovo. The people of Coimbra made use of the imports from the far western foreign soil by way of monopoly, thus ensuring their own profits. They labelled western things as “miracle products” which the aristocracy bought for exorbitant prices. Their wares had included exotic

weapons and armour, lanterns of eternal light, and even nostrums for curing any illness. Coimbra initially paid for these things in high quality gold and silver as well as other gems and metals, but later exports began to include paintings, ornaments, and silk. While there was great risk in long distance voyages, vast profits were enjoyed on both sides which resulted in ideal conditions for trade.

金金金Unfortunately, when the first in line of succession, Grohl Wardka was appointed viceroy of Coimbra, the situation completely reversed. There was religious upheaval on the continent of Mundonovo from which the new regime instated a continental trade embargo, revoking all exchanges with heathens. Those who were caught smuggling were labeled as heretics and punished by a quick death; the unlucky ones subjected to lengthy executions.

金金金Coimbra still had its treasure until its northern gold mines ran dry. The event had nothing to do with Viceroy Grohl, but for the common man, “Everything is Grohl’s fault. He doesn’t have the blessing of the Sun God,” was a standard explanation.

金金金The effects of the empty mines quickly surfaced. Coimbra’s position as the premier trading partner with the southern archipelago was usurped by the easterly province of Ribeldam. Even the silk merchants who had once come from the capital via the Bahar province began to take the shortest rout to Ribeldam, stopping the flow of goods and people, killing the province’s livelihood. Miners who had lost their jobs lined the roads, hesitant of where to go, and the many active merchants of the south simply abandoned their districts to the empty, scattered stalls. Those bitten by the lust for gold also vanished, leaving nothing but air in their places. Not even Viceroy Grohl could stand idly by. In order to find new mines he made huge investments, and to combat low employment he offered land to clear for agriculture, and long term positions in the military.

金金金While such efforts did have some effect, the full economic prowess of the previous golden age was still a long way from recovering. Conversely, the increased military expenditure required higher tax rates which further burdened the people and aggravated rising dissatisfaction. Even their constant, pressing negotiations with the Mundonovo continent were in vain. Regardless of what Grohl proposed, it fell upon deaf ears. Finally, as insult to injury, an insurrection began in Coimbra’s north.

金金金Various complaints had made their way to Emperor Befnam’s ears, and in his eyes the prince’s inaugural ceremony was on the verge of being canceled. It wasn’t just an issue of the leading candidate for the throne suddenly becoming inconsequential, but it also called into question the ability of the ruling emperor, and marred his rule with a negative stigma. It was one thing for him to allow his son a fiefdom out of fatherly affection, it was a different matter, however, if the result of it was a full scale revolt.

金金金“Even blood relatives are to be removed from office should they prove themselves incompetent.” Such was the single most important legacy of the first generation Emperor Bergis.

…

“Viceroy, we have just received word that the rebels are advancing south. At this rate, the Rockbell district will be threatened as well. This is an emergency, and we need to devise a plan for our countermeasures.”

“……”

金金金Seated on the throne, the Viceroy of Coimbra, Grohl Wardka grasped a chalice of wine in the silence. A vein was bulging on his temple.

“… V-viceroy?”

“Those disloyal little shits! Do they realise how much money was wasted on trying to find them more gold!? What is the northern garrison even doing!?”

金金金The northern regions from which the rebellion had sprung had initially been appropriately garrisoned. There were even stations posted along the highways, so there was no reason for the soldiers not to take action. As the rebels were just passing through without obstruction, it felt like his soldiers were doing nothing to stop them. At that point, it would have been good news if they hadn’t joined the rebel forces.

The trusted retainer Wilm addressed his words to Grohl who was red in the face with rage, “Our opponents seem to be indecisive because of their proximity to their families. At present it is difficult to estimate their combat potential.”

“For what purpose do they think I pay their wages? Is it not an attempt to deal with the situation?”

“M-my lord, the guards are also former miners.”

金金金It would be a best case scenario to say that the guards hadn’t joined the rebellion, and just remained as civil servants. While that was certainly the case, simply stating it outright could only serve to further irritate Grohl.

“So what! Shall I bring in the national army now!?”

金金金Throwing some papers to the ground, Grohl rejected the official’s words. His blood was boiling to the point where it would be a considerable task to calm him down. Wald was truly shocked, but he kept it from showing on his face by stroking his white beard.

金金金As I thought, this man isn’t emperor material. His transparency, and quickness to speak are habits many years beyond repair. It makes me doubt how much of His Majesty Befnam’s blood is in him.

“… Viceroy, it is now the time to consider our options for dealing with the rebel army. Shall we commence peaceful negotiations, or is extermination more suitable than argument? If this isn’t swiftly resolved, the seeds of future troubles will have already been sowed.”

“Dialogue with the fools who have already drawn their swords is an impossibility!! Muster your troops, we prepare for a subjugation!”

“Wai- please give me but a moment. The soldiers are also the people of Coimbra; ordering them into such a senseless slaughter could only sully your reputation…” before the official could finish his words, Grohl bellowed his rejection.

“Such verbosity! How long does it take for your men to prepare, Wilm!?”

“The subjugation force should be assembled in about two weeks from today. Working overtime could complete the process in only one.”

“Then rush the mobilization at once! Listen well, for the fall of Rockbell is unacceptable! That district is my wife’s birthplace, and should it be lost, my Sarah’s honour will be tarnished!”

“Understood!”

金金金The official rushed out at a brisk pace. Coimbra’s standing army numbered approximately 30 000 strong, but the full force would never be concentrated around the capital city of Madress. The northern garrisons were out of the question, so the soldiers had to be gathered from the southern belt. Regardless of Wilm’s own pace, the assembling of a punitive force required a full week’s time.

“Fuck! That bastard Amil’s eyes were mocking me! There’s a rebellion now, so I guess I’m the funniest guy in the empire!” Grohl kicked over a nearby stool, and rose with an infuriated expression.

金金金Wilm’s cold gaze took in the scene. He had been serving since Grohl was a child, but still held little affection or loyalty towards him. His true loyalty was to the incumbent emperor, and to the furthering of the Horsheido Empire’s prosperity.

金金金From Wilm’s perspective, placing Grohl on the emperor’s throne would be nothing short of a failure. The successor was almost certainly going to be a prince from Bahar by the name of Amil. A rumor was spreading that at the inauguration ceremony, Amil was to take Horsheido as a surname and become the crown prince. There were even whispers that he was to be adopted by Befnam and soon thereafter enthroned. Wilm found such stories were not lacking in credibility.

金金金However, Amil’s lack of mercy is slightly disconcerting. For example, how thorough he’s been in usurping his own older brother’s position. It seems he intends to take the first emperor’s words to heart.

金金金“Even blood relatives are to be removed from office should they prove themselves incompetent.” Amil’s rough plan was progressing favourably. Wilm had been in communication with Amil for some time, so he was aware of the full details of the rebellion. Providing arms and funding from behind the scenes, the one who fanned the smouldering coals into flames had been Amil the whole time. He’d even managed to keep hidden that the rebel leader Ristih was in fact a knight from Bahar.

金金金To the nobility of Bahar, it was only natural that the rebel army was composed of mercenaries and Coimbra’s northern serfdom. In Wilm’s eyes, Grohl was incapable of suppressing the revolt as he had no combat experience, and his leadership skills were lacking; he was paranoid, and quick to show his intentions; and he held great pride in himself, but was severely lacking in charisma.

金金金This subjugation would be hard fought; the rebellion, feeding off the people’s hatred, would drag the punitive force into a quagmire. Just as the rebels would be poised to take the entirety of Coimbra, the Bahar guard would sweep in and splendidly depose the agitants. Finally, Grohl would assume full responsibility, and most likely forfeit his position as viceroy. Furthermore, there had been other preparations in order to ease the execution of the plan; it was the reason that Grohl’s wife Sarah had been so thoroughly encouraged to visit her home.

金金金Sarah’s father, Count Barel, had his fief of Rockbell along the border between northern and southern Coimbra. It was guaranteed to be a centre of conflict when the rebel forces advanced on the south. Knowing this, to ensure Sarah’s position on the brink of the revolt, Wilm proposed that Sarah spend some time with her father. He did not feel a sliver of guilt at leading them into a trap.

“Wilm, do you know if Sarah’s party was able to escape to safety? It was your idea that she went there! There’s no use denying it!”

金金金Towards the accusatory comment, Wilm knelt with a serious expression.

“I hadn’t anticipated this kind of scenario. At this moment, I am utterly contrite. We are currently unable to contact Lady Sarah. The current plan is to continuously send scouts to confirm her safety. If it comes to it, I will willingly lay down my life to escort her to safety.”

“Whatever you do, be sure you save her! Order Gaddis to advance on Rockbell at once! Give him strict orders to buy time for the main force!”

金金金Coimbra’s military was controlled by the two great generals Wilm and Gaddis. For over fifty years, and since long before Grohl’s appointment, the two soldiers had dutifully served.

“It shall be done.”

“… That infuriating bastard of a rebel army! I don’t even care about the people anymore, I just want the rebels to be entirely eradicated!” Grohl spat in a loud voice after acting as viceroy.

金金金His retreating form was locked in an icy glare.

金金金Only your status and ambitions shall be eradicated. It would be best to pray to the Sun God for the safety of your beloved wife and son. You never would have had the Sun God’s blessing for yourself anyway.

金金金Once Grohl was removed from power, it didn’t matter what became of his Sarah and her son. If they lived a humble life in a remote location, there would be no need to kill them. The rebel army did, however, plan to leverage Grohl’s wife and child as hostages in order to make him yield.

金金金If he refused to comply, killing him wouldn’t be a problem. That stupid man was guaranteed to try and hurt those who offended him, so he was unlikely to stop before every participant in the rebellion was dead. In that case it would be acceptable to have him legally answer for his crimes as viceroy.

金金金To think that a former child prodigy would be in this state. People are truly a mystery.

金金金At first, Grohl was the most favoured of his siblings. This was demonstrated when he had been granted Coimbra as his fief, and so far, he’d depended on his own childhood fame to maintain his social status. The 5th prince Amil had begun to supplant him. While growing up he had never displayed the signs of genius, but what he did have was wisdom, and, during his time as viceroy of Bahar, he successfully oversaw the enstatement of many splendid social policies.

金金金As Coimbra was crumbling, he authored Bahar’s embetterment. Amil had bought provincial improvements, and secured his position as viceroy through hard work; furthermore, he had managed to steal the place of the leading candidate for succession.

金金金Grohl hated his younger brother Amil with such vehemence that he almost considered them to be at war. It had taken considerable efforts from Wilm to get him to calm down. Mere knowledge of the depths of Grohl’s grudge against Amil would have given Emperor Befnam an aneurysm. The plan was to remove Grohl from power, and mop up the situation his rule had spawned.

金金金The day will soon come when my hard work is rewarded. Until then, I must put up with this fool’s temper.

金金金Ironically, Wilm was Grohl’s most trusted vassal. He’d accompanied him since childhood, and betrayal was simply not considered. Being unable to gauge other people’s intentions was Grohl’s greatest vice.

…

金金金The Red Circle Army continued to march, each man as he pleased. Neither rank, nor file existed as they marched so that they were hardly worthy of being described as an army. Aside from their splendid banners, nothing served to signify any differences between them and common bandits. Mixed in with the crowd, Noel and the others from the village walked onwards.

“I’m glad the weather is holding up. The good sun being in high spirits is making my own mood better too.”

“That had an awkward flow… Look around, the only person with such an optimistic facial expression is you.”

金金金With his own face quite stiff, Mirut pointed to his jaw. The men with red cloths wrapped around their arms moved their feet while maintaining a nervous look in their eyes. Their hands held crude spears or bronze swords, and while better than nothing, the only thing protecting their bodies were copper breastplates. They were like lambs,

waiting for the regular army to lead them to slaughter; however, they were numerous. As far as Noel could see they were approximately five-thousand strong, but she was sure that many would flee as soon as battle commenced. While thinking about other people's affairs, Noel turned to look at Fraser and Kraft.

"You two sure are making some deathly expressions. Looking closer, you really do look like a couple of corpses. Do you guys have proper circulation?"

金金金At Noel's joking, Fraser burned red.

"S-shaddup! Let it be."

"Of course we look like we're about to die. See this? All I have is a hoe. What do they expect me to do with this in battle?"

金金金Kraft looked at the hoe with a pained expression. They were useful enough as farming tools, but weren't things created with the intentions of killing; doing so with them would be unthinkable.

"Well, the long ones have good reach. See, my spear is long too. Come on, look, look!"

金金金She removed the bident from her back, and whirling it around, poked at Kraft, trapping his neck between the prongs. At that rate it seemed she could sever his head in a single stroke.

"Noel, s-stop it with your bad jokes. Uh, um, the tip is touching me!"

"See, the long ones are handy. If you swing that hoe at your opponent's head, it'll definitely do serious damage. Just plow the contents of their skulls, okay."

"Uuuu… somehow, I feel worse."

金金金Even though she had been trying to encourage Kraft, it didn't have much of a calming effect; rather than that, Kraft's face actually became slightly more blue than it had been before. While she tried to think of better ways to comfort him, a ludicrously loud voice was heard from behind.

"Oi you kids! What are you going to do with such a shitty weapon? We aren't here to play around!"

"You're always so loud! What else could I expect from a Baharan?"

"I could say the same about you! Hey brats, I'm talking to you!"

金金金A middle aged man who was growing some stubble, and a fox-eyed slender man approached. A red cloth was wrapped around each of their right arms, and they sported iron armour and steel swords. At a glance they could be appraised as experienced men; they were much more hardened than the people of Zoim.

"W-we are, are we?"

"That's right. Even though you tried to act tough, things like a shabby hoe, and an old bow aren't enough are they? And those clothes really won't do!"

金金金Noel, like the others, checked her own gear. They had leather breastplates, hunting bows, and a farmer's hoe. The only high quality weapon in their possession was Noel's bident. Noel had left her bow in the village on account of the awkwardness of transporting arrows in significant quantities. If she needed to kill people, she felt her bident would be more than enough.

"B-but, this is all we had in the village."

“It’s true, looking closely though, it’s pretty shabby. That said, did you really bring a hoe? What do you expect to do with that in battle?”

“You just said that was useful you know!” though Kraft was dumbfounded, Mirut had retorted quickly.

“I don’t worry about the past.”

“It just happened!”

“Really, was it like that?”

金金金Noel smiled and stuck out her tongue, which cause Mirut to sigh exhaustedly. The middle aged man hadn’t expected the exchange, and burst out laughing.

“What an interesting woman this red haired miss is! So many of the people here walk around with serious faces, I’ve gotten sick of it. Oi, Ned, you think so too right?”

“As I said, your voice is too loud. Be quieter or it’ll burst my eardrums.”

金金金The man called Ned was covering his ears and shaking his head.

“It’s fine, I’ve lived many years with this! Right, now that the mood is good, I’ll show you something fun! You’d better be thankful to Mr. Geb!”

金金金The stubbly… Geb signaled to a man behind him, who brought something forward. He dumped a large cloth bag before them with a thud.

“Feel free to take your favourite weapons and armour from the lot. The original owner isn’t around to miss them anymore.”

“T-that is…”

金金金To the nervously enquiring Kraft, Geb grinned like a madman.

“That’s right, when we were crushing a village that don’t comply, we got this stuff from a fool who fought back. He was a tottering old geezer, but he still was quite the rascal.”

“He was probably a retired soldier. Well, now that he’s dead it doesn’t matter much,” Ned yawned disinterestedly.

金金金He took a canteen from his belt, and drank in a leisurely manner.

金金金With a serious expression, Mirut took a sword from the bag. Its iron blade had no major flaws.

“Is it alright if I take it?”

“I don’t care. It’s heavy so taking whatever is fine.”

“Thank you very much. Hey, you guys should be grateful too. We don’t know what the future holds.”

“Right!”

金金金At Mirut’s prompting, the others of their village gathered around the sack. Of copper breastplates and iron swords, they chose as they liked. Kraft as well, threw down his hoe in favour of an iron spear. Noel wasn’t particularly interested in any of the items, so she didn’t participate in their rummagings. She didn’t see anything that could become a new treasure after all.

“Oh right, what village did you guys come from?”

“… Z-zoim village.”

“Ah, that run down village we just passed? The following guys probably sacked it. They target the women, and probably everything else. Every place we pass ends up like that.”

金金金While Geb was joking about atrocious things, Mirut averted his gaze. Not a word was said about the other villages. Thinking about earlier words, he figured the villages that opposed were all destroyed, and the ones that complied were forced into a pitiful state. As it was just the way Noel had predicted, they weren’t surprised.

“So~, that is, not many fled separately?”

“Now don’t misunderstand me here, I’m not trying to push the blame onto anyone. It’s just a bit of admiration, that’s all. Even though they were villagers, they would have had to have thought well to realise what would happen. So, somebody told them to evacuate. It can’t have been that old headman?”

金金金Geb asked around the area, but none of the men from the village would meet his eyes. All but one avoided his gaze.

“That was me. I was teaching Mirut.”

“Oh, so it was the miss then. Oi, Ned, you hear this? My discerning eyes were spot on you know.”

“I get it. Tone it down.”

“By the way miss, what was it that made you think of hiding the villagers? Intuition?”

To Geb’s question, Noel smiled and answered honestly, “It wasn’t intuition or even just thinking for a bit. After all, even though the Red Circle Army introduced itself as such, it’s real face is that of a locust. There is only one thing to do when a swarm of locusts comes to feed as it moves from one feeding ground to the next.”

“O-oi, Noel!”

金金金In a panic, Mirut and the other’s tried to halt her words, but Noel’s mouth wouldn’t stop.

“Isn’t it strange to think to leave some bait out before they arrive and escape with the rest? So before they were eaten, I was teaching them the proper way to escape.”

金金金Saying that, as Noel laughed she jovially patted Geb who was also of good humor, but the trailing Ned’s smile vanished.

“The miss’s words aren’t wrong, and she doesn’t seem to shy away from nasty things either, eh? You lot, after this I’ll have you properly learn the common sense of this world.”

“I, I’m sorry, I’ll listen properly when you do.”

“And it isn’t just taking things by force. You have to agree on who gets what share. That way you can get things in good faith. We’re all the same sort, so it’s only natural to help eachother out. Am I right?”

“Y-yes.”

“As long as you understand. Right, now it’s about time we…”

Towards the Geb who was, to everyone’s annoyance, just warming up, Noel called out, “Hey, is it alright if I ask a question?”

“What? Well, I’m fine with questions every once in awhile. Don’t worry, my wife ran away, so it’s okay if you fall for me.”

“Pffft, take a look at yourself in a mirror and you’ll stop spouting that nonsense.”

“I don’t need to hear that from you, you rotten fox-eyed bastard!”

金金金Geb and Ned started a shoving match with eachother. Interrupting them, Noel walked over.

“So~, do either of you know how to attain happiness? If you do, I’d appreciate you telling me.”

金金金Surprised by her abrupt questioning, Ned and Geb paused to think; however, even though they were seriously considering their responses, they continued to grapple. The other soldiers in the Red Circle Army began to watch them as they continued to march towards their destination.

“… It’s a pretty tough question, but my answer is this: whatever it is, win. It’s admirable if you win, you get good drinks, and other good things. Money too.”

金金金Noel removed her memo from her breast pocket and carefully transcribed Geb’s response.

“I see.”

“Oi oi, you’re writing everything? We sure have found an eccentric one, eh? In that case, be ready to write my answer down too.”

“Alright, I’m ready.”

“My answer is: be on the winning side. In order to attain the delicacies of life, be smart, and always conduct yourself in such a way as to profit. It’s surprisingly difficult, but the rewards are vast.”

“Yup, it does seem kind of hard to do.”

“What are you trying to teach the kid? With that kind of thinking, how is anybody supposed to get stronger? Real victories are the ones you gain with your own hands.”

“It’s the truth of the world though. Loud words won’t fill your stomach. Even if you do the right thing, it doesn’t mean you’ll be successful. All you can do is carry yourself well. That’s the secret to living well in this world.”

After completely recording the pair’s thoughts, Noel expressed her thanks, “I appreciate your input. I’ll keep this as reference, okay.”

“Well, give it your all. Be sure to remember me when you find happiness.”

“That goes for me too. My name Ned by the way. Be sure to remember that.”

“Yup, I will!”

“Good answer. Well be sure to live and we’ll meet again.”

金金金With toothy smiles, at Noel’s reaction, Ned and Geb laughed as they wandered away. Noel too smiled at the recent developments. Sunny days had the best moods, whereas rainy days had the worst moods. Noel was a girl whose face reflected such a thing.

“As I thought, good things happen on sunny days. I learned two new ways to attain happiness.”

“I’m surprised that you weren’t killed. I swear you’re shortening my lifespan.”

金金金Fraser was wiping a cold sweat.

“It’s been bothering me for a while now, but why are you so intent on finding happiness?” Mirut asked the question that was on his mind.

金金金The quest for happiness was a part of the human experience, yet Noel’s search was extreme to the nth degree.

“That’s because it’s everyone’s dream. Finding happiness was what we all wished for; at least I can find it.”

“Will something special happen when you find happiness?” the question slipped out.

金金金If happiness was ever truly found, of course good things would follow. The problem was that for the moment, what that happiness looked like was a mystery. The thoughts floating in Mirut’s head were focused on how to find food, and the other various ways he could continue a peaceful existence each and every day. He was sorely unaware of this, but what he did know was that his goal was somehow different from Noel’s.

“I won’t know how to find happiness unless I try. I haven’t gotten there just yet though.”

“… Is that so.”

金金金Mirut averted his gaze, even as he spoke. His days had never been happy his entire life, but at the same time, he’d never been resentful of it. It was possible that he had allowed his time of happiness to slip by without ever noticing.

“Well, if you put it that way it might work. Even I never really found much joy in that village…”

Interrupting Fraser, Kraft thrust himself between them, “That’s a lie! Earlier you said you had a belly full of happiness.”

“Be quiet you gangly bastard!”

金金金Fraser landed a direct hit to Kraft’s head. The people of Zoim, tired and nervous, jeered at the staggering boy.

“Ugh, there’s no helping these guys.”

As Mirut was about to join in too, Noel muttered to herself, “But, I do know what happens if I don’t find happiness.”

“… Just what happened to you?”

“Hey, what do you think happens?”

“You were about to say. Hurry up and explain.”

“Ha, if Mirut can’t find happiness, I know what will happen. It would definitely be best if you found happiness,” smiling mischievously, Noel stood and began to walk alone.

金金金Noel laughed brightly, but the look in her eyes seemed somehow hollow to Mirut. It reminded him of the emptiness of a soulless doll; artificial, with neither hope nor despair.

…

金金金Geb and Ned had departed from Noel’s group and returned to Ristih.

“Where were you loitering? Your ranks are lower than mine in this Red Circle Army! Have some awareness of your commanding officer!”

“Understood, Captain Ristih. Please continue. Ned foolishly wandered off without listening to me.”

“Apologies, Captain. Even though it was entirely this idiot’s fault.”

Geb and Ned bowed without grace, as Ristih nervously rebuked them under his breath, “… Refer to me as Sir Ristih, this isn’t Bahar. It’ll be a serious problem if we’re noticed by the people of Coimbra before the operation is complete.”

“Okay, okay, I get it.”

“This guy’s always too loud, so you probably should have said that earlier. I tried telling him, but he wouldn’t listen,” Ned’s words caused Ristih to furrow his brow.

“Seriously, have you adopted the laxness of the peasants surrounding you? Don’t just befriend the plebeians for fun!”

“My behavior is usually appropriate. In battle I’ll do my best, but I don’t know how well they’ll do.”

“I don’t think any of the stupid rebels will figure it out. I’m just saying this, but are they even prepared for battle?”

金金金Ristih was slightly shocked. His life was dependant on the rebellion. If the decision was made for suppression, it would become a war. He’d been half forced into his role, and didn’t seem to have made such an extreme resolution. The situation had made it nigh impossible for Ristih to ever fulfill his ambitions.

“It’ll be fine, the lot’s bound to shape up once they’ve seen a bit of blood. Once they’ve plundered once, there’s no going back. He he he, just leave the Rockbell district to me.”

“… Is it truly best to destroy Rockbell after all?”

“Of course. There are plenty of excuses for wiping the place out. We’ll have to get the recruits used to the blood and greed eventually. Besides, it’ll be more fun this way.”

金金金Geb sprouted an evil grin. He could easily be mistaken for a brigand, and even the thought that he was one of Bahar’s knights would have surprised people. Ned nodded beside him. Although originally from Coimbra, he was a man who had left for Bahar in dissatisfaction. The sacking would defile his hometown, but he didn’t seem to have any complaints. Ristih, as the leader, had to consider both destroying the target, and having it surrender because the goal was not a war of conquest.

“Are you out of suggestions on how to get the local lord to capitulate? If Viceroy Grohl’s wife and child are captured, we won’t need to waste our efforts.”

“I don’t think he’ll hand them over like a present to a daughter. Besides, if you try something that slow, it’ll give time for the real army to come out of southern Coimbra, which would make the toppling of Rockbell all the more difficult. Now is the time to take it all in one stroke.”

金金金They had done well in fanning the flames of rebellion in the hearts of the people, but they were still not of the strength required to take the capital city. The full force of the provincial guard was 30 000 well trained and equipped professional soldiers, whereas the rebels only had a disorganised rabble around five thousand strong. There was no way they could confront their opponent directly if they were facing its full force; however, Grohl was famous for being inefficient, and the Coimbra divisions were also the worst in the empire. If Ristih could beat back the punitive force, there was a chance he could favourably negotiate for the capital’s surrender. It was for that goal that ‘ad urbem

vinco' became their mantra.

金金金The plan was to lengthen the rebellion to give Bahar an excuse for military intervention, but that wasn't the main issue. To defeat Falid, and deliver it into Amil's hands, complaints needed to be raised, and great deeds needed to be done. Ristih was confident he could do it.

"All right, at this rate we'll invade Rockbell, and seize victory in one fell swoop. Though I do pity the residents."

"Entrust the vanguard to me. Starting with that district, I'll show you an easy victory. He he, exciting, eh?"

金金金Rockbell's guards were few, and their spies were well established there. It would surely fall, and reinforcements wouldn't be able to arrive in time.

"Sir Ristih, if you could spare them, I would appreciate you lending me a hundred men."

"Oi oi, what's this Ned? I thought you didn't want to play around?"

"They are to be saved for later, for something much more fun than short term pillaging. If I do have them, I might achieve the greatest feat of the campaign," Ned pronounced with a satisfied air.

金金金Geb acknowledged his statement without believing it while taking a sip of water from his canteen.

"What exactly are you planning, Ned? There's no issue with allowing you only one hundred men. They're all rank and file, are you sure you can rely on so few?"

"I'm originally from Coimbra, so I know its geography well. In the wooded groves stretching west of Rockbell there's an abandoned fort that will prove useful when the fighting begins. I thought we might be able to conceal a significant body of troops there."

金金金Ristih nodded while rubbing his chin.

"… I see, you thought this through quite well; will only a hundred men be enough?"

"The fort has the appearance of a ruin, so even some ten-odd men would be enough. If we take too many and are spotted, there'd be no meaning to it all. One hundred men will be perfect."

金金金With his fox-eyes locked on Ristih, Ned twisted his mouth into a grin. His whole body seemed convinced of his plan.

"Right, in that case, your column is in charge of securing that fort. Take some of our Baharan soldiers. The operation will give us more options if Grohl's wife and child are hidden. If you ever need reinforcements, immediately send word."

"Yes sir. Please leave it to me."

"Geb, you take the vanguard to besiege Rockbell. When the defence is low, flood them with your reserves!"

"He he, roger that!"

Eyes locked on the pair, Ristih stood, raising his voice, "We, the Army of the Red Circle, march now on Rockbell! We march to crush the defenders of the capital, our final goal! So that Viceroy Grohl can know of our intentions, to the world in which our target lies, we must rouse ourselves now more than ever!"

金金金Blending in with the crowd, the soldiers from Bahar raised their arms with the rest of the men.

Author's Note:

The continent is the continent of Libelika. The continent of Mondonovo is in the west, and the furthest south are the southern islands. The Coimbra province is in the south-western area of the continent of Libelika. Imagine Nagasaki.

Translator's Note:

Nagasaki was Japan's primary trading centre with the Portuguese and Chinese although most of the similarities in this work are with the Portuguese. Initially the ports brought great prosperity due to the trade, but Christianity was also one of the imports. Later when Toyotomi Hideyoshi feared that the Spanish were working with the Catholic church to attempt an invasion of Japan (due to some poor negotiating tactics on the Spanish side of things), after some killings (with the Japanese doing most of the killing), there was a ban of foreign trade which lasted some time into the Tokugawa era too, but was eventually lifted. Catholicism was also banned at the time, and many of the "big name" samurai lords renounced their faith. Some of them didn't, however, and were (maybe incidentally, unless the whole thing was a conspiracy) sent to invade Korea, but that is mostly unrelated, and happened during Hideyoshi's reign.

The author was significantly influenced by other aspects of Japanese history as well. Some of the parallels I was able to draw, though I admit to potentially overthinking things a bit, include:

- Rice tax
- Rebelling against the government while claiming ultimate loyalty to the emperor
- A warrior class (country in the case of this novel) being ostracized by the more cultured courtiers in the south, and eventually taking over
- A continent to the west and islands to the south
- Old forts laying about (in Japan that would be the forts they built when they first feared a mongol invasion)
- A flag with a sun emblem
- The sun looks red in the minds of the people (I wouldn't expect 'the land of the rising sun' to depict many yellow midday suns instead of the red ones that are its namesake, but as far as I know, neither Horsheido nor Noel have any reason to think of the sun in any colour other than its usual yellow aside from their author being from 日本)

I think I learned the above from: *A Brief History of the Samurai,* by Johnathan Clements; Japanese Imperialism 1894-1945, by W.G. Beasley; and looking at the sky. Please don't expect me to be an expert. If you are interested in learning more about any of the things I mentioned above, please research away. Honestly, I'd be impressed if anybody read this far into a translator's note.

…

I used "ad urbem vinco" instead of " so the capital surrenders" because I think Latin is a good way of making slogans that don't sound cheesy.

Editor's Note:

Since I am Canadian often times programs default to American spelling and this can lead to some inconsistencies; all this to say, if you find some please let me know.

PsychoBarcodeTranslations

金金金Noel and the others were admitted into the newly formed flying column, and they began their march towards the old abandoned fort with the fox-eyed Ned as their commanding officer. His mouth in a smile, he cheerfully advanced. The young ones who were following him had to fight the weight of their weapons and armour which they had yet to grow accustomed to carrying. Even keeping up with Ned was a struggle for them. Their destination was at the heart of the forest, and as they made their way through the trees with vision obscured by the foliage, there was a constant need to watch their footing due to the uneven terrain. All of their strength went into continuing the march.

金金金After taking a deep breath, Mirut wiped his sweat. Although he was used to rushing through the mountains every day, his feet were beginning to hurt. He too was new to the heavy equipment, but Noel on the other hand, was lazily matching the commander's pace whilst yawning and stretching in a relaxed manner.

"… Oi, you. What's up with your energy even though you're a woman? Isn't this all kinds of strange?" Mirut asked between breaths.

金金金His ragged voice sounded like he wanted to stop and rest.

"This much isn't an issue. I don't think you guys exercise enough…"

"No, you are definitely the weird one here. Just look around and see."

金金金The only few who had maintained their composure were Ned, five soldiers, and Noel. The rest all had the faces of dead men, and appeared likely to collapse at any moment; their fatigue was unmistakable.

"The simple folk are the ones worn out here. Captain Ned, and the few surrounding him, seem like they're used to it already. It's like they are military."

金金金Although the statement elicited many nods, it didn't account for Noel. She wasn't soldierly from any angle at all; she was just a girl who casually defied common sense.

"That may be so, but it doesn't give you guys any excuses."

"Uh, well, in my case it's because I'm special I guess. When Mr. Sun is shining, I'm always full of energy," Noel flashed her teeth as she smiled.

金金金It wasn't an unexpected answer at that point, and Mirut sighed while shaking his head.

"Ah, I see now. I get tired whenever you speak."

"It must be hard for you."

"It's your fault!"

"Oh, by the way, do you know where Fraser and Kraft are? I haven't seen them in a while."

"Yeah, that? They're with the main force advancing on Rockbell. It sounded like they'd be in the first waves. That idiot Fraser just dragged Kraft along with him to the front."

金金金Kraft had been opposed to fighting, but was swept along by Fraser's hot blooded enthusiasm. He had basically become Fraser's henchman, and it seemed he had yet to rebel. Apparently he had heard good things

about the upcoming campaign from Geb, and now that he was on the side that pillaged, his ambitions had flared to the point that Kraft had even begun to imitate him. They made the vanguard their goal. Mirut had tried to keep them in check, but Fraser heard none of it. The rest of the Zoim fellows had gravitated towards the flying column.

“I see. I guess it just can’t be helped.”

“What can’t be helped?”

“Oh, it’s nothing.”

“What is it? I’m just more curious now,” although he glared at her, Noel had already been distracted by something else.

“Ah, could it be? Is it that mossy, overgrown building there? It gives me that kind of feeling you know,” Noel pointed in the direction she was looking.

金金金In a small clearing was a moss covered stone fort. The massive walls which retained their dignity despite their age were crumbling on all sides. It felt they could be breached in the blink of an eye.

金金金Exactly what they were going to do with the place, Mirut and the others had not yet discerned.

“You wait here. We’ll survey the situation. I want absolute silence, okay?”

金金金Ned spoke in a voice that could kill, and five men lay down to approach the fort. Wary of their surroundings, their eyes surveyed the area. They swept through the ruins, and the surrounding clearing in its entirety.

“Exactly what‘s happening right now? Somehow, something amazing must be hidden here.”

“In this rundown, crumbled place?”

“As I said, there has to be something we came here to find.”

“I guess so.”

“I wouldn’t hide here though. After all, it seems like the kind of place that’s easily found, but not easily fled from,” Noel explained herself while absentmindedly approaching a tree.

金金金It was in an inconspicuous location, and appeared to be able to comfortably conceal them, but the inspection of its interior was taking longer than anticipated.

“Then where would you hide?”

“Hmm, I guess I’d maybe hide in a hole or something.”

“What, are we ants or moles now? They don’t even hide for long.”

“There are all kinds of different holes you know. I just don’t want to hide in any more graves.”

金金金Her own words called up unpleasant images, and for an instant, she found herself in a familiar downpour. Although someone had responded to her, Noel’s eyes were closed, and she no longer had the will to continue the conversation. Hearing that, Mirut stopped, and stooped down to recover some stamina. The others too, finished up their conversations and averted their eyes. While they remained that way, Ned’s group finally returned.

“Alright, everyone listen up. As we face off against the Rockbell district, I might as well reveal the true reason that we came to this filthy place,” after a dramatic pause Ned’s face sprouted a grin before he continued, “We only have one aim: to capture Grohl’s wife and child when they attempt to flee from Rockbell. If we succeed in this mission, the

chances of achieving victory will increase dramatically. We'll be holding his family hostage after all."

"B-but, will we really find them here? All I can see are ruins," one young man timidly enquired, and Ned nodded with confidence.

"Even I was slightly worried before we got here, but what of it? After meticulous searching, we've found traces that this place has recently been used."

"I-I see?"

"Oi, what kind of answer did you want? Now is the critical moment; our hands can grasp the target. The rewards will be great, and you'll feel a lightness in your chests if we succeed. As there will be resistance, if you don't fight hard, you'll die quickly."

"U-understood."

"Don't be scared, lighten up. You have to psyche yourself up before a fight."

Ned slapped the boy on the back, and then, after looking over the others, coldly explained, "We are to capture the woman and child without killing them; however, should they resist, incapacitating them forcefully isn't a problem. We kill the rest of their party. Now is not the time to hesitate due to fear."

"S-so we are expected to kill?"

"Kill or be killed. Either way, I don't care. Just know I won't retrieve your corpse."

金金金As Ned made himself clear, the youths stiffly nodded.

"Scour this fort with a fine toothed comb! Leave no stone unturned. Search the basements, and the rooftops. Be sure to call out if you find anything. I'll be waiting near the entrance in case they try to escape… oi, are you even listening? Hey, the miss over there, I'm referring to you."

"Yup, I'm listening. I'll search really hard you know."

金金金Noel, at least try respond appropriately for once , or so Mirut thought, but Ned didn't seem to mind.

"One of us today will be the one to capture targets. I'll make a full report, so expect rewards. Speak up if you understand!"

金金金Ned had called out in a loud voice to intimidate any hiding inside the fort. The others too, spoke up loudly.

"Understood!"

"Then here we go! Take the fort, and capture Grohl's wife and child! FLUSH THEM OUT!!"

金金金Ned drew his sword, and advanced on the fort. Shortly thereafter, Mirut and the rest began a charge as well. Noel too, readied her weapon, but she cautiously advanced in the rear of the formation. Unconsciously glancing at the sky, she noticed that although clouds were present, the sun was in good health. Having confirmed this, Noel hastened her pace.

…

金金金In the rotted fort, Sebtem fort, the trapped young knight Cynthia Edrich was greatly troubled. Cynthia's mission was to escort the Viceroy Grohl's wife and son, Sarah and Elgar, while they visited Rockbell. The timing had proven poor as during the visit, an uprising took root in the north of the province. The rebel army was gaining

considerable strength, and eventually would aim to take the capital city of Madress. En route, the rebels would be forced to pass through Rockbell. For Cynthia, that news meant it was time to immediately return her charges to the capital, but Count Barel had rejected her proposal.

金金金Although his will to protect his daughter was strong, what overpowered it was the fear that he would fail at his task. Barel himself would never admit to such a thing, but Cynthia was sure she had figured him out. The compromise she proposed was that, rather than remaining in the district that was sure to become a battlefield, they would instead take refuge in the old Sebtem fort. With that as the plan, Barel had reluctantly agreed, and so, before fleeing to the capital, the arrangements had been made to hide. It had only been done because Cynthia had so strongly pushed for it. They were supposed to lay low and meet up with the regular army when they came to drive out the rebels.

金金金There were no problems before now. I never thought the rebels would have someone who knew of this spot!

金金金It had been struck from the maps; however, there were many locals who knew of the old Sebtem fort. There should have been no way the rebels who advanced from the north could know of it.

金金金Yet, how?

金金金Already, men with red cloths wrapped around their right arms had broken down the gates and were entering the fort. Cynthia's guard was only 20 strong whereas the approaching rebels numbered about one hundred. Normally, they wouldn't lose to such rabble, but they were disadvantaged by the necessity of protecting a woman and child. It would be difficult to keep the two out of harm's way. They bore the name of Wardka if they were to be captured, the rebel's morale would skyrocket regrettably.

金金金They are probably after Lady Sarah and Master Elgar, but their timing is too good… Unless they have spies on the inside.

金金金Many ideas spiraled through her mind, but there wasn't enough time to calmly consider them. She decided to quietly escape through the hidden tunnel in the storehouse rather than to fight, and so that she could ensure the wife and son escaped, she would stay behind as a distraction. Old rags had been posted on the wall nearest the door to the storehouse which, although primitive, could serve to disguise the entrance. It probably wouldn't deceive anyone for long, but it had the possibility of buying some time due to the darkness of the storeroom's interior.

"Knight Cynthia, as I feared, the door has rusted and cannot be opened!"

"We'll use the war hammer! Quickly, or they'll catch up!"

"U-understood!"

"Wrap it in the cloth so the sound is dampened! Hurry!"

"Sir!"

金金金Cynthia angrily reprimanded the soldiers. Pressed against eachother, Sarah and Elgar's faces became blue. She wanted to tell them that they would be fine, but couldn't bring herself to utter such irresponsible words.

金金金The soldiers readied the cloths, and swung the hammer. A dull thud reverberated through the storeroom. They scowled at the sound that was much louder than anticipated, but were unable to do anything about it. All they could do was pray that no enemies were coming to investigate. They held their breath and gripped their weapons. A foul smell assailed their noses. They attempted to check for pursuers through a rounded hole in the door through which they had entered, but as it was so dark the situation could not be accurately assessed. The room beyond the door was largely similar to the one they were in, but there should have been light filtering in from the upper stories. They had recently been able to comfortably peek out so the current situation was supposed to be an impossibility.

“… What? Who cut out the lights?”

“Would this help?”

“Thanks.”

金金金With a torch lit, and held up to the peephole they once more surveyed the other room.

“Gh…!”

金金金Cynthia let out a small cry as she leapt away from what she thought was the door. They had gravely mistaken the reason behind the sudden darkness. It was a human eye. From the time they had entered, Cynthia had been directly in front of the door, so its owner couldn’t have properly spotted the others. It was but a small spot on the door that had remained uncovered by the cloth they had hung. The two enemies had been face to face, only separated by a thin door. It was an encounter that sent shivers down Cynthia’s spine. If she hadn’t been on guard, she would have undoubtedly screamed. Though her goosebumps told her to flee, she knew her situation.

“Knight Cynthia, whatever has happened?”

“T-there, there’s somebody out there!”

“Ah ha ha, I~ found you.”

金金金From the room beyond, a young woman’s voice could be heard, and was followed up by the sound of repeated strikes to the door. Those inside knew they had undoubtedly been found. Although the door was wooden, it’s construction was solid, and it probably wouldn’t break easily; however, the situation was proceeding unfavourably. The blows were gradually becoming heavier with time, so that the impacts began to shake the very air.

金金金What should I do? At this rate, they’ll call for help. I’m going to have to sally forth.

As Cynthia made her choice, she turned to the nervous soldiers and issued her orders, “This enemy is mine! The rest of you escape with Lady Sarah and the prince! Whatever happens when I head out there, do not open the door!”

“B-but…”

“I will go too!”

“Unacceptable, do not forget our duty! Listen up, I’m going to shut that door! Do not worry about me, just hurry and escape!”

金金金Grasping her sword, she forced open the heavy door. The person before her eyes backed away after making a surprised noise. With the time that bought her, Cynthia slammed the door shut, and confirmed the sound of it locking behind her. Her subordinates had followed their orders. Cautiously, she observed her opponent. She could only see a young woman. Her blood red hair was surprisingly lustrous.

金金金So young. She’s probably only in her mid teens, but I can’t overlook a traitor who joined the rebellion!

金金金She’d hesitated at the thought of killing a child, but quickly resolved herself to her task.

“Are you the only one here?”

“Yup. I’m the only one who’s found you.”

“I see. How did you know?”

“Well, on that wall there, a cloth was blocking the gaps. If you look hard enough, it’s pretty obvious that something is

hidden there you know.”

金金金Cynthia quickly glanced over her shoulder to check. Certainly, there was a cloth blocking the gaps in a door that looked fortified; however, it would be difficult to spot at a distance with the current light levels. The girl before her must have been quite perceptive to notice. That her gift may have brought about her own death was a tragedy Cynthia could hardly express.

“Are you with the rebel army?”

“Yup, basically. Also, it isn’t just a swarm of locusts, it’s called the Red Circle Army. At least it has a good name, eh?”

金金金The red haired girl nodded while carelessly smiling. She was armed with a long bident, she wore a leather cuirass, and a red cloth was wrapped around her arm. There was no doubt of her affiliation once she had stated the rebel army’s name. Cynthia reaffirmed herself once more.

金金金Sadly, she must die. I can’t afford to overlook anyone right now.

金金金To create a false sense of security she decided to ask her name. It would probably be her final conversation.

“My name is Cynthia. May I hear yours?”

“Sure, I guess. They call me Noel…”

金金金As she unguardedly spoke, Cynthia launched a swipe at Noel’s throat. She aimed for the throat of the girl who had not yet prepared for a fight. It was hardly the honourable behavior of the knightly caste, but for the moment Grohl’s wife and son were the priority. Furthermore her opponent was a traitor; there was no need for honour. Putting power into her left leg, with both hands she brought down a diagonal swing from the right with all of her force. She felt her blade flex as a shrill metallic clank could be heard in the room.

“Suddenly attacking isn’t very fair.”

“Y-you caught the blade!?”

金金金The two prongs of Noel’s bident had magnificently trapped her opponent’s sword. The shock of the impact numbed Cynthia’s hands. Noel’s face went from carefree to vicious in an instant. Her bloodlust was palpable. Cynthia had never experienced this before in any of her previous battles.

金金金T-this one isn’t a regular insurgent!?

金金金So she wouldn’t lose her cool, she endured.

“It feels like I won’t get my hands on the treasure in there unless I defeat you I guess. So, I’ll fight with full force okay?”

“Silence, vile traitor! Receive this sword as judgement!”

金金金Instead of a proper reply, she again slashed at her opponent. She was confidant her physique was superior, and so she planned on victory by overpowering the other. The rebel had a bident, and also a reach advantage. With that in mind, Cynthia decided to abandon defence, and quickly dispatch her foe from up close.

“Die!”

“Woah, pretty speedy, aren’t you.”

金金金She warded off the swipe at her chest with the shaft of her bident. Utilising her momentum, Noel attempted to

strike Cynthia with the butt of her bident, but she avoided the blow by jumping back. To think her swordsmanship would lose to a spearman, Cynthia's blood rushed to her head.

"You, insolent little…"

"Hey, you're breathing pretty heavily over there, are you sure you're okay? Should we take a break?"

"Don't make fun of me!"

"I wasn't though."

金金金Noel had been on the defensive and had yet to seriously attack. With tip and haft she'd batted aside blows, and her footwork had lightly maintained an advantageous range. Cynthia had been easily evaded; over time her strikes became erratic, and her movements dulled.

"Huaaaa!"

"Ah…"

金金金It seemed the easy target was an illusion. Noel would leave intentional openings, and dodge skillfully when they were lashed out at. After a feint, she quickly thrust with her eyes locked on Noel's lower abdomen. Regrettably, the blade only grazed her right side, and in a counter attack, Noel landed a kick squarely on Cynthia's stomach. The blow carried considerably more force than what had been initially received.

"Ghh…"

金金金It was as though the hit had pierced through her entirely, and her voice was probably let out due to the pain. Her armour had done nothing to help, and gastric juices had been forced out of her stomach and out her mouth. Her knees trembled in pain, and her posture was broken by a strike from the butt of Noel's bident. While trying to get up, Cynthia found the tip of the bident thrust before her face. The two prongs halted just before gouging out her eyes. Cynthia's movements stopped, and she gasped in surprise. With only a slight move, her life could have been ended.

"Move and you die. I probably shouldn't kill a woman, but I will. So, please obediently drop your sword okay?"

"I, I refuse! I cannot sully the honour of Coimbra's knights at the hands of an insurgent!"

金金金There wasn't much she could do, but she wouldn't comply. A knight could never dishonour herself at the words of a mere rebel. At her spirited refusal, Noel made a difficult expression.

"No matter what?"

"Of course! Just do it already! I sacrifice myself for Coimbra!"

"Ha~h, what a pain. Since it's bothersome, I might not kill you after all. If no one finds you, it shouldn't be a problem," Noel winked and inclined her head.

金金金Pausing for a moment, she made her decision and put power into her arms with a sharp gaze.

"Didn't I tell you not to move? Lay still if you don't want your limbs broken. I'm only going to leave you half dead."

"Gh…"

"For the moment, that sword is bothersome, so drop it okay? I'd hate to accidentally skewer you after all."

金金金Cynthia wondered if she was about to twirl the bident, but instead found her sword struck from her hand. It was so fast that she had not even been able to react. As one final act of defiance, she unsheathed the dirk from

behind her, but her right hand was swiftly knocked aside.

“H-how shameful it is! To be undone by a rebel, nay by a young woman!” Cynthia admitted defeat after fighting as hard as she could.

“These kinds of days do happen. It’d be nice if you win your next fight…”

“You fucking bastard! Don’t make fun of me!

金金金From where she had risen to in her anger, Cynthia could see a young man had descended from the upper floors.

“Oi… I heard some intense shouts from here, what’s happening. Wait, what did you do!?”

“Mirut! Good timing. Can you help me with this? I found this woman named Cynthia though…”

“Wha- seriously!? No way, did you capture her after a fight?”

金金金Mirut cautiously approached.

“I already won, see. Now come and help me.”

“A-alright.”

“You brought a longish rope right?”

“Ah, but it’s not on hand right now. Should I grab the guy who took it?”

“Okay, just tie her hands behind her with the red cloth. It’s better than nothing.”

“True.”

“Unhand me traitor! Keep your filthy hands off of me!”

金金金Cynthia began to resist, but his sword quickly jabbed at her, and she realised it was futile. Mirut tied her arms behind her back. All she could do was pray that those inside had escaped to safety.

“Shit…”

“We’re done then eh?”

“By the way, did you really defeat this knight woman? She is a knight right?”

“Yeah, basically.”

“…. What’s up with that? If she surrendered to you, are knights surprisingly not that big of a deal?” Saying that, the young Mirut rudely looked down at Cynthia.

金金金He didn’t want to say that an amateur like Noel had defeated her, and so he gazed at her amazedly. Cynthia’s face flushed red in anger and embarrassment.

“She was pretty good, so you’d probably have died Mirut; in two halves with one blow. Or maybe your throat would have been cleanly slit, I don’t know.”

“S-shut up… Just because I’ve never really used a sword doesn’t mean…”

金金金Stuttering, Mirut’s voice began, but suddenly, he felt goosebumps running down his spine.

“Stop that! More importantly, there’s a kid in here somewhere right? Wait, was the woman’s name Sarah? I can’t recall…”

“Something looks hidden behind this door. It’ll be pretty hard to break down, so let’s just call Captain Ned over.”

“Right, I’ll get him. You stay and watch the knight woman.”

“Keep this a secret from the others or it’s no good. We found her after all. If more people gather, the reward will diminish you know.”

“I know.”

“Then, we’re working together. That’s right, I’ll share with everyone from Zoim so it’ll be all good. Monopolies are bad right?”

“What kind words,” scoffed Mirut with a wry smile as he ascended the staircase, leaving Noel and Cynthia behind.

“Be that as it may, this place is pretty dingy. It reeks of mould, and I can’t even see the sun’s rays down here,” Noel tucked her bident under her arm and plopped down next to Cynthia.

“…”

“…”

“… Um…” Noel raised her voice, unable to stomach the silence.

金金金Cynthia had her eyes closed, and was permeated in stillness.

“Hey Cynthia, as a knight, you’re pretty strong, eh? Like when you almost ran me through, that was pretty dangerous.”

“…”

“Hey, hey, is it okay if I ask you something?”

“…”

“Ehe, I guess it’s no good after all. I guess there’s no helping it then.”

金金金Noel laughed remorsefully, and leaned against the wall.

“This way, Captain Ned.”

金金金After a while, Mirut had finally returned, and he dragged with him, three men. The fox-eyed Ned was scratching his black hair as though it was a bother.

“Yo, miss. It seems you defeated this knight woman, eh? That’s quite the achievement.”

“It seems her name is Cynthia. She came from in there,” as she explained, Noel pointed to the door which had the ragged cloths hung behind it.

金金金Ned nodded to his two subordinates and gestured them to destroy the door.

“All right, we don’t need to be subtle, just break it down. There’s probably nobody in there anymore, but maintain caution.”

“Sir!”

金金金The subordinates took out a steel hammer they had prepared and began to batter the door. Hearing the conversation, Cynthia’s face twisted into a scowl.

金金金How could they know that no one’s inside?

“Actually, I’ve been quiet about this up until now, but this fort has a hidden escape tunnel. Knowing that, I sent you guys in here to flush the rats out. My men are already posted at the tunnel’s exit you know. The appearance of total troop commitment to the search was simply an illusion.”

金金金Ned had taken a few aside after giving the order to charge, and snuck them around to the tunnel’s exit. Only around half of the flying wing had actually been searching the fort. Obviously, they hadn’t informed Noel of this either.

“How did you bastards learn of the tunnel!?”

“He, how do you think? Isn’t it mysterious? Well, I guess you could call it a revelation from the Sun God.”

金金金Ned sneered at her. Cynthia, seeing his expression, finally realised how they had known. She herself had seen the man before. His hair had changed from brown to black, but there was no mistaking his identity.

“Wait, so we don’t get a reward?”

“The viceroy’s wife and son are my gift to the men. The true victor here is obviously this Ned. Well, I’ll be sure to treat you all to a meal some time.”

“Unfair,” Noel’s words were sharp.

“That’s right, adults are unfair. He he, now that you’ve seen the world’s true colours you’ve gotten sulky, eh?” He patted Noel’s head as he made fun of her.

金金金The sound of splintering wood cracked through the air. The door connecting the two spaces was finally beginning to falter.

“Captain Ned, as expected, there’s no one inside!”

“We’ve located the entrance to the tunnel. They must’ve escaped through here!”

“Good work men. No need to chase them. They may have prepared an ambush after all. Now, shall we dispose of this woman and meet up with the rest? They may be having some trouble.”

金金金After yawning some, he placed his hand his sword.

“Nedicas?”

“Eh?”

“You bastard! You’re the Nedicas who served in the Coimbra guard! With those fox-eyes, and lowborn grin, even with a different hair colour, it is as clear as day!”

“And who are you exactly?” Ned spouted angrily, but Cynthia continued without pause.

“Three years ago, my party was sent to hunt you for escaping with military funds! You ended up fleeing for Bahar!”

金金金In a few steps he had run to the adjacent Bahar with his ill gotten gains. As there were political barriers to entering Bahar, they had to request permission from Great General Wilm. They had requested entrance; however,

they were denied. There was even a rumor that Nedicas had joined the Baharan military. With the cold relations between the two provinces such a thing was not improbable.

“Oh, whatever this is, I don’t understand. You seem to have mistaken me for someone else.”

“Silence! Embezzling funds from a position of authority is inexcusable! Why are you even in the rebellion you git!? You wouldn’t follow a man acting as the voice of the plebeians!!”

金金金With a profoundly disingenuous sigh, Ned had covered his eyes with his hand. For Noel, and Mirut who were watching it all, they didn’t understand.

“Captain, what do we do?”

“What do you mean ‘what do we do’?”

“Well, she’s been talking too much…?”

“We were going to kill her anyway, so don’t worry about it. Not that it would hurt to shut her up a bit early.”

金金金At the subordinate-like man’s words, Cynthia raised her eyes. His accent felt familiar somehow. She realised he had a Bahar accent, his words were pronounced at a different cadence than those of a native to Coimbra.

“You bastards have Bahar accents… Wait, why are Baharans fighting in Coimbra’s rebellion!?”

金金金Even as she spoke, the pieces began to fit together in her head.

“Er, no, I’m not a Baharan. You’re totally mistaken, right Captain?”

“This idiot. He’s shaking so much it practically confirms her story.”

金金金Seeing the man, Ned disappointedly shook his head. The situation was taking an unfortunate turn, and Cynthia’s eyes widened in astonishment.

“No way…”

“Oi oi, can you seriously stop it with that. I have no guilt on my conscience, so why do you want these forced conscripts over here to get involved?”

金金金Although he threatened her with a sword, her words continued to gush forth.

“Is the rebellion backed by the Bahar military? Were the initial agitants to stir up the people Baharans!?”

“Ah~, you had to say it.”

“D-do you cowards know no shame!?”

金金金Cynthia bared her teeth as she shouted. Her magnificent blond hair seemed to stand on end in pure hatred.

“Shut up, stupid woman!”

“Gua!”

金金金Kicked in the face, she fell to the floor, dispersing the dust which had accumulated on the stone. Blood ran down her face, but she paid it no mind. She already knew the truth, and to the bitter end she would fight; in death she would not die.

金金金The information needed to be conveyed to Viceroy Grohl. It was no mere rebellion, but a grand conspiracy.

“Do you realise that your careless words have added two more corpses to the pile? You really are beyond help.”

金金金At Ned’s signal, two of his subordinates drew their swords and approached Mirut and Noel causing the former to turn blue.

“Eh, w-why? Aren’t we on the same side?”

“I’m sorry Noel, and… was it Mirut? This fool said too much, so we have no choice but to kill you. Curse the ones who cursed you.”

“Why!? I don’t even understand what this is all about, and I definitely won’t speak of it!”

“We just can’t have people noticing. Rumors will spread and grow with time. You wouldn’t even need proof to start people doubting the cause, all that would matter is whether or not they’d believe you. You understand that the Red Circle Army is a mishmash of all kinds of people, and we can’t risk it collapsing right?”

“So you kill us. Adults really are unfair, eh?” Noel expressionlessly retorted; unlike Mirut, she did not speak for fear of death.

“Pretty much. I don’t like that this is how your reward turned out. I will make proper graves for you two, so try to forgive me.”

“W-wait!”

“I’m not making you a grave. I’ll torment, and torment, and torment you, until you finally die in eight separate pieces. You made me kill two innocent children, so expect a punishment.”

金金金Ned spat, and gave the order. Naked blades glistened in the darkness. A red rain of blood splashed. A smell quickly filled the air, and the stone floor grew puddles of a rusty red.

“I almost fell asleep during your speech you know.”

“Eh?”

“Hey, are you okay Mirut? Your eyes are spinning…”

“A-am I safe?”

“You’re safe as far as safeness is concerned, but these guys lost their necks. Look, see?”

“UHYAAA!!”

金金金Confirming the horrific scene, Mirut released a strange voice and fell backwards.

“That was an interesting sound. Hey, where did that even come from?” Noel comfortably enquired.

金金金As Cynthia had just regained consciousness, she couldn’t immediately understand the situation. Noel had brandished her weapon as the men drew their swords, and decapitated them in a single stroke. There were only two in the room who had yet to bleed.

“This isn’t a situation to laugh at jokes…”

“I guess so. It’ll be hard, but I guess it can’t be helped.”

“Who could have known there would be such a monster here? Don’t even think about coming over. Don’t come close. This is the worst!”

“I’m not a monster, I’m Noel. Isn’t it a good name?”

“I hate it. You’re a monster we never anticipated; suddenly, and without warning, there is a beast that strikes out at helpless sheep. I don’t know what created you, but this must be fate’s game. These rules are seriously the worst.”

金金金Ned thrust his left hand before him, closing in on Noel surprisingly fast. He was probably throwing something in a desperate attack. Waiting for Ned’s inevitable charge was a merciless attack. She threw her bident. Cutting through the air, it pierced his armour, torso, and spine.

“Gh…”

金金金Groaning, and with his entrails scattered, Ned was pinned to the wall. His lower half tore off. At seeing his own wretched state, his fox-eyes held great despair. For better or worse, he hadn’t been killed instantly. Noel started to hum cheerfully as she walked away. Her path was straight over her defeated opponents’ viscera. The sound of splashing and bouncing haunted the ears of Mirut and Cynthia.

“I-it ne-never came. M-my achievements, even though… I could finally… grasp…” Ned slurred in a weakening voice.

金金金Such a thing was not supposed to happen. He could have never anticipated seeking asylum and fame in Bahar could lead to this.

“You won’t find happiness just by being on the winning side, eh?”

“I… used my… head, but… it didn’t work… out, eh?”

“Does this mean Geb’s ‘always win’ is out too?”

“W-who knows. A-at least… try… your best… lest, you… end up like….”

金金金Ned died without ever finishing. He’d lost the last of his strength before the final line. So was the final moment of the man who harboured ambitions of fame obtained by betraying Coimbra for Bahar. Noel removed her spear from the wall, as Ned had already completely fallen to the floor. Seeing the bifurcated man, Cynthia instinctively averted her gaze.

金金金Is this a nightmare?

金金金Although she had been spared, in her present state she could hardly be said to be comfortably alive. She could not escape the feeling that she would be the next to die. Such cold chills could be felt along her spine; she felt the need to speak up, but somehow, the words couldn’t form. Her mouth was completely dry. Her heart rate had increased. Her body was unconsciously shivering. Noel had become a spawning ground of nightmares, bathed in crimson blood.

金金金Removing a notebook from her breast pocket, she scratched out an entry with a diagonal line.

Translator’s Note:

Happy one month anniversary! I’ve been translating at a potentially unsustainable rate, so this doesn’t mean that my schedule changes for the moment. I worked so hard to bring this one out early that I discovered the approximate amount of text I could translate before my own lack of sanity when writing became more of a stumbling block than my

inability to read most kanji. If the last bit is off translation wise, I might have to redo it after some sleep, food, and… bloodbaths? Honestly this might not have been the best chapter to be insane for, but I guess it is a little thematic.

Editor's Note:

Sometimes I like to help out with this project. I definitely don't wait until the last day to do the editing…I promise.

< Previous Chapter | Index | Next Chapter >

PsychoBarcodeTranslations

“Well then,” saying that, Noel turned around, and wiping the bloodstains off her face with her sleeve, she approached Cynthia.

“Kh…”

金金金With a sense of impending doom, Cynthia drew herself back. There was no way to predict what the young girl would do next, and it was the unknown which terrified her. She couldn’t help but think that the innocent smile which had earlier floated across Noel’s face had been completely alien. Of death she was not afraid, or that was what she had always thought. She herself had beheaded some rebels before; however, she had never gazed into the abyss as deeply as she now was. Eyeing the state that Ned and the others had fallen into, despite her best efforts, an insatiable dread gnawed at her stomach.

“You have three choices to consider.”

“W-what?”

金金金Gazing timidly at the bodies, Mirut’s voice eked out. It was his first time seeing the dead; naturally he had never killed a man before. He had witnessed his first exchange of human lives, and his mind had not caught up with the rapidly developing situation. While he was grateful for being saved, it took all of his might to understand what was happening.

“It’s a discussion of what we’ll do now you know. This affects you too Mirut, so stop spacing out, and help me think.”

“If you say so. At this rate, isn’t it fine if we just join up with the main force? We know the people who will be assaulting Rockbell after all,” Mirut tilted his head as he thought aloud.

“That is our first choice after all, eh? Only, if we choose that, I’m pretty sure that there will be some problematic things to deal with.”

“Why is that?”

“Well then, here’s a question for you. Who was it that killed Captain Ned?”

“… you did, so?”

“Why were we about to die?”

“Because we heard how Captain Ned was actually from Bahar… To prevent the spread of rumors we were to be silenced.”

“And if we mention that after we return, what do you think will happen? Do you think that Ristih, the leader of the rebellion’s army, will just forgive us?”

金金金Noel jokingly continued her scenario. Whether she was acting, or being down to earth was difficult to tell. Even though she had recently killed three people, she continued on in her own little world, completely relaxed.

“If what Ned told us was true we’d probably, no, we’d definitely be killed. It’s a seriously no-good topic after all.”

“That is true, so I guess rejoining the others is out then.”

金金金Noel, with a deep breath, plopped down beside Cynthia as she had done before. Although Cynthia's face had stiffened, and she'd attempted to roll away, Noel grabbed her cloak, and refused to release it.

"So, for the second choice I thought up all kinds of things, then I ignored them and figured we might just go back to the village and sleep. This option is the simplest, right?"

"True. It does seem simple."

金金金It wasn't bad. Originally, they hadn't volunteered to join the rebellion. Despite their dissatisfactions, they had never intended to take up arms and fight. There wouldn't be anything strange about returning home as if nothing happened. When the rebels had extorted the village, Noel and the others had yet to join them.

"Unfortunately, if we encounter the trailing rebels, we might see some terrible things. Also, if we return to the village against the flow of the rebel army we'll seriously stand out. The problem is that we know Geb, and if we get brought before him, he'll already know about Ned."

"I'm just saying this, but he did seem pretty dangerous. I don't know of any roads back that will allow us to pass by undetected, so it seems like returning to the village is also out."

金金金There was no way to navigate the mountains surrounding the village. Without access to the main roads, they would be limited to unmarked trails, and with neither money nor supplies, such a plan could only be described as suicide. Returning by highway would also lead to confrontation with the rebels.

"Hmm… this is tough."

"Don't act pretentious and just tell us your third option. It's your most thought out plan right?"

"Yup, that is, we'll join Cynthia in protecting the viceroy's wife and child. The rebels are probably not too combat effective so we could probably win by helping the knights in their duty, and we might even gain some plentiful rewards to boot."

"Wha…"

金金金Cynthia balked at Noel's words, but they did make sense. The shock of an enemy who had captured her suddenly discussing becoming an ally had caused her voice to leak out.

"Look, even though it is easy to say that, we are in the rebel army. I'm ineffective enough to be beheaded myself, so this idea sounds ridiculous to me."

"We were only participating due to coercion though. To top it off, the leader is some guy from the neighbouring province. I think I know how to properly tell them; besides, at this rate, the rebels themselves won't be able to find happiness."

金金金She wasn't speaking in her usual flippant tone. She had adopted a manner completely foreign to her usual simpleminded ways. It seemed as though her very mindset had changed.

"Hm…"

"If you don't want to, Mirut, you can do whatever. I'm going though."

"F-fine, I get it. We go with option three. Just remember, I'm not responsible if this woman doesn't say what we want her to," in the heat of the moment, Mirut agreed to the plan.

"What we do if that happens is simple. We break Cynthia's neck and run," spouting words like a general, she spun Cynthia to face her, "That said, you will be rewarded for our safety, so I expect cooperation. Your answer?"

“To betray at the first sign of profit, do you rebels know no shame!?”

金金金Cynthia spat in disgust. Having regained her composure, her knightly sensibilities returned.

金金金Noel may have been an excellent combatant, but she was also extremely lowborn, and Cynthia didn’t like that. While she had been defeated earlier, she was filled with the sense that she wouldn’t lose a second time.

“There’s no other way if I want to achieve happiness. It is the reason that everyone fights after all. I’ll ask once more; will you promise to help us? We don’t have much time, so this is your last chance.”

金金金Noel retrieved the iron hammers from the soldiers she’d killed earlier. She calmly raised one in preparation to bludgeon Cynthia’s head, and expressionlessly let her statement hang. It was immediately apparent what she intended to do if refused; the hammer would crush Cynthia’s skull, and add another corpse to the pile. Faced with such an efficient death, the fighting spirit that had previously welled up dispersed. Thinking further, it wasn’t even an unbalanced trade, or so Cynthia decided to believe.

“I, I understand. You have my word. I swear on my honour that you will live.”

“It’s a promise.”

“Y-yeah,” Cynthia answered while looking aside.

金金金The threats may have been too over the top, but they hadn’t the luxury of waiting for support. That was what she thought, but Noel had spoken in a tone that suggested she’d anticipated everything. She wiped the blood and grime off her face with both hands so that the sight of her wouldn’t cause others to divert their eyes.

“You aren’t allowed to go back on your word, so take good care of us okay?” Noel flashed her teeth in a smile that lit up her face.

Fort Sebtem, near the exit of the secret passage in the tunnel which ran from inside the fort to a natural cave deep within the forest.

金金金When the viceroy’s wife and child were escorted from the cave as they attempted to escape, the Coimbra soldiers who were guarding them were ambushed. The 50 rebels Ned had planted were surrounding the exit with spears at the ready. At the sight of movement, a volley of arrows was unleashed which had already killed several people. Even though Sarah, the viceroy’s wife, was the one being guarded, she had suffered an arrow wound to the right arm. The rebels had around double their numbers, but as they were amateurs in a loose formation, command was nearly impossible which left them open. It wouldn’t be impossible to break out, but such an offensive tactic wouldn’t be able to effectively protect their charge, and so the situation had become a stalemate.

“Throw down your swords and surrender! That way, Grohl’s wife and child will be guaranteed safety!”

“Silence shithead! We will give our lives to protect Lady Sarah and Master Elgar! Rouse yourselves, all of you!”

金金金At those words, both forces readied their spears. The rebels used their bows sparingly, as they had been ordered to capture the wife and child alive. Furthermore, if they waited, Ned and the others would ride out from the fort. There was no need to rush.

金金金From further inside the cave came several people, including Noel and Mirut who both had red cloths wound around their right arms. They were followed by the still restrained Cynthia.

“Captain Cynthia!”

“Knight Cynthia, what has caused such an appearance!?”

金金金Responding to the knights’ calls, Cynthia hung her head. Seeing that, the rebel leftenant smiled. It seemed that Ned’s group had finally arrived. Among the rebels present were two from Bahar, and including Ned, there had been three in the fort. They were the most reliable combat force the rebels had, all their other soldiers were recruits, but having surrounded the enemy, and even having a hostage made their opponent’s surrender more likely. Looking at the woman who was captured, the leftenant was sure she was an officer.

“Hold! Is that woman their commander?”

“Yes sir, she is a Coimbra Guard officer in charge of one hundred men, Cynthia Edrich! With captain Ned’s assistance, she has been captured!”

金金金Noel, with her right arm extended before her, executed a perfect Horsheido salute, and her usual jovial tone had vanished. The leftenant was slightly shocked, but quickly regained himself. Ned may have taught her how to do that. He was surprisingly friendly, and was the sort of man to look after his subordinates. It was mysterious that even though he was temporarily a rebel, he still taught a salute, but that sort of thing didn’t need a profound reason anyway.

“He, you kids sure have grown in the time I didn’t see you. Did Captain Ned teach you that?”

“Yes sir, he coached us in various things! I believe Captain Ned will be arriving shortly!”

“I see, I see! Sit tight until then. If you don’t want that knight woman dead, throw down your arms!!”

“Kh…”

金金金The Coimbra Guard were hesitant, but threw down their swords and sat on the spot. With the successful pincer maneuver, their chances of success evaporated. Pathetic resistance would have done nothing to help the woman and child escape.

“All right boys, collect the weapons, and tie them up! Make sure they can’t move! Kill the ones who resist!”

“Y-yes sir!”

金金金Following the leftenant’s orders, the younger rebels came down with ropes. Their hands were unsteady, and it was unclear whether or not they had properly restrained the knights.

“Hah… you can’t do it, can you? Have you ever tied something before? Here, I’ll show you how it’s done.”

金金金The leftenant removed Sarah, who had been shielding her son, and raised Elgar by his hair.

“What are you doing!?”

“P-please stop!”

“Unhand me, vile peasant!”

“Awww, the wittle prince is reprimanding me. Listen up, anything goes so long as the brat doesn’t die. He’s just one kid, so he can’t do much… Ah, he’s seriously annoying!”

“Please release Elgar!”

“You’re getting pretty annoying yourself!”

金金金Receiving a kick, Sarah released a pained sound.

“M-mother!”

金金金Elgar reached out to help her up, but his hand could not reach her. The leftenant’s mouth twitched, and he tugged on Elgar’s hair.

“She won’t die, so don’t worry. Well, for the moment.”

金金金Laughing, after poking the child’s face, he tied him up. Elgar looked repentant, and tears began to well up, but there was nothing that could be done.

“Still, Captain Ned is taking his time. Oh yeah, are the rest of the men still in the fort?”

“I have a report about that!”

“What is it? These things can just be said you know. I’ll be the one making the captain angry later if you don’t.”

“Understood. You have my apologies!”

金金金After giving her response, Noel approached the leftenant. Elgar glared at her, but she ignored him, and she again saluted the leftenant.

“Ei!”

金金金Suddenly, her concealed hammer came crashing down. The leftenant experienced death, and crumpled on the spot. His helmet had dented, and his limbs convulsed as he lay there. She made sure of his death by crushing his throat beneath her right foot. Falling there, he had not fiercely resisted. It was so fast he hadn’t had the chance. It was a method Noel had learned a long time ago.

“… w-what?”

“Mirut!”

金金金Noel called out, but Mirut was petrified and unable to move. He was supposed to stab the other Baharan while he was still surprised by what Noel had done, but Mirut found himself unable to move in the moment.

“Eh, ah.”

金金金Noel tutted at him as she made her way over to kill the man herself; however, his sword was already drawn and in the process of swinging down.

“The one who hesitates in battle will die! If you don’t want to end up like this that is.”

金金金Cynthia swung her blade to shake off the blood. The fallen soldier from Bahar had taken a slash which split his right shoulder. Cynthia hadn’t been restrained, and had simply had the red cloth wound around her arms. She had a sword, and was placed near the periphery of the rebels.

“I am Cynthia, Captain of 100 Coimbra Guard! I’ve heard of your circumstances from Noel. If you surrender now, your deeds as rebels will be forgotten! If you comply with my offer, you may simply leave the rebel army in peace!”

“S-shutup! We don’t need your words!”

金金金After some silence, the braver young ones hurled jeers. They were the ones who had actively chosen to rebel.

“Whatever training you have, don’t think you can compete with regular soldiers! If you don’t want to die, throw down your arms!”

金金金Cynthia roared as she, without using a weapon, knocked the sword out of a young man’s hand. It was only then that the tightly grasped weapons of the rebel forces began to be relinquished. Cynthia’s subordinates quickly rose up, took their weapons, and once more became a fighting force.

“I’ll explain the circumstances from here on out, including the reason behind the rebellion’s origin. After that, decide for yourselves. Just be aware that joining the rebellion is a serious crime. Don’t think that claiming to have been forced into it will be accepted after this.”

金金金Having finished the initial statement, she continued on to explain her theory on how the rebellion began. The Coimbra soldiers were irate, and from time to time expressed their rage. After listening to Cynthia’s story, although the flying column was doubtful of her words, all of them still chose to leave the rebellion. Not only did those coerced into joining quit, but also those who had volunteered as they did not like the idea of being used by the nobility. Most of the people decided to return home, but the people of Zoim, and several of the other curious ones, decided to follow Cynthia. That was because they wished to receive a reward from the viceroy of Coimbra, or to join in on the front lines as volunteer soldiers. Naturally, none of them had particularly admirable goals. Noel was thinking about how important appearance was while looking at the other people and yawning, and a vein on Cynthia’s temple bulged.

“Lady Sarah, your wound…”

“I am fine, thank you. An arrow wound is a trivial matter.”

“For this degree of incompetence, how can I apologise?”

“It was thanks to your efforts that I was saved, please take pride in that. Furthermore, the one who had planned this was my father, who will take responsibility. In fact, I am the one who should be ashamed,” Sarah clearly stated.

金金金The one responsible for not only his daughter, but also his grandson had been Count Barel. Usually such a thing would call for prosecution; however, mercy had its place. If Grohl’s family had not been there, it would have been dubious as to whether or not he would have sent reinforcements. If he had been so reluctant, it may have lessened his retainers’ loyalty. They would not express dissatisfaction aloud, but it made suggesting improvements to the government difficult.

“We should quickly hide from the remaining rebels, rest until nightfall, and then head for the nearest guardpost.”

金金金If they could, they would head to a nearby village and acquire a horse drawn carriage, but that could only work if the village did not support the rebels.

“I’m entrusting everything to you. Elgar must survive. Arms, or legs, I’d sacrifice anything to keep him safe.”

“Mother, must you speak of such things?”

“Elgar, you will inherit Coimbra one day. Selfishly dieing on your own is not allowed. You cannot forget this,” Sarah’s words were both a warning and an admonishment.

“Young prince, rest assured. I shall ensure the two of you safely return. Your guards will put all their efforts towards this goal.”

金金金Cynthia saluted at attention, and turned to give orders to her subordinates.

“Hey, hey, is that the viceroy’s kid? You called him “young prince” right? Even though he’s so small, he sure does

look proud, eh?”

“Oi, I can hear you!”

“I want to be important too. That way I might find happiness you know. Hey, should I act important?”

“Can you just stop now? Even if I say that, you’ve been all self-important for a while now.”

“Is that so? Then should I become viceroy?”

金金金Cynthia looked at Noel with eyes that wanted to kill as she muttered absurdities. She wanted her removed in a single strike, but had to dismiss the idea. From her movements earlier, it was clear that Noel was no amateur. To walk up to the enemy’s commanding officer as though it was a simple visit whilst concealing a war hammer required nerves of steel. Even up to his moment of death, her opponent had probably never realised her intentions. It couldn’t be known what she would do if she went back on her word. Cynthia couldn’t imagine Noel’s potential response; she couldn’t shake the feeling that the hammer was coming for her next.

“You there, don’t chatter about nonsense! Make your preparations so we can quickly leave this place! Also, to you who’ve become volunteer soldiers of Coimbra, remove those red cloths! They are an eyesore!”

“Understood, sir!” Noel happily replied.

金金金So as not to stand out, they had not moved far from the fort. The sun had been veiled by night’s cloak, and so they had decided to rest. The soldiers aside, Sarah’s exhaustion had built up considerably. She was unaccustomed to navigating difficult terrain by foot, so it was no wonder that she was so exhausted.

“Knight Cynthia, would it be acceptable to light a fire?”

“Not really, but given the circumstances, it may become unavoidable. Maintain vigilance.”

“Well, are you going to start one then?” Noel asked cheerfully, as though she was asking an old friend.

金金金It seemed her memories of being enemies were already distant in her mind.

“You don’t speak to me like I’m an officer anymore? It might just be my opinion, but you had excellent form during your performance earlier.”

“It’s tiring in all sorts of ways you know. More importantly, if you won’t start a fire, you can let me do it. I brought an amazing treasure with me. I think it’s a super miracle item anyway.”

“A miracle product? What would you be doing with such a high class thing?”

“He he, I found it.”

金金金Having said that, she rushed off to where the soldiers were preparing a fire pit. She suddenly grasped her bident and thrust it into the ground.

“What are you doin’?”

“Just watch, okay? Because this is pretty great. Here I go!”

金金金Noel lightly tapped it with her finger, and a flame burst from its points. Beneath the interwoven branches, the blaze roared energetically.

“What’s that?”

“Just now, the fire spread from that spear. I named it ‘the curious spear’. It really is curious isn’t it?”

“No way, even of the miracle products, I’ve never heard of something like that! What kind of mechanism is involved!?”

金金金Drawing closer, just as the hand was about to trace the spear’s patterns…

“It’s hot!”

金金金Emitting incredible heat, it couldn’t be properly grasped. The rest of the soldiers tried to grasp it as well, but on touching it, they all gasped in pain.

“It looks like if anyone besides me touches it, they get burned. Such a curious thing…”

“What’s curious!? I don’t get it! Are you sure it isn’t cursed?”

“That was rude. It’s one of my treasures.”

金金金Perhaps there was oil in the shaft, that was released at the tip. The usual explanation would be that the ignition method required thrusting the tip into something and the friction from tapping the haft, but if what Noel said was true, then she could produce the flames at will. It was absurd, yet convenient.

“So the bident could do something like that, eh? I had no idea either.”

金金金Even Mirut, who had known her the longest, hadn’t been expecting it.

“Amazing isn’t it? He he, it is one of my treasures so I won’t give it away you know.”

“It is incredible, but you don’t really need it to get so hot. If you can’t hold it there’s no point.”

“I also have a curious picture book, would you like to waste some time reading it?”

Mirut raised his hands and shook his head, “Save that for Cal. If we make it safely back to the village that is.”

“I truly can’t understand your reasoning. I have difficulty comprehending you and your treasures. I’ll say this once, do whatever. You’re the only one with such nonsensical ideas.”

金金金Noel was happily reading the worn book. Glancing at it from the side, its pages were wrinkled, and the writing was illegible. Cynthia’s mental fatigue increased yet again as she further considered how to achieve her objective; how she could salvage the uncontrollable situation. If she played a poor hand, she could wind up by herself; with such a scenario dangling over her head by a thread, she couldn’t easily smile. After quenching her thirst with some water, she sighed as if to expel her hazy thoughts.

“Hey, Noel.”

“Hm?”

“That Cynthia’s in charge of one hundred men right? How much of an achievement is that?”

“It’s better than ten, and worse than a thousand.”

“No, that much I understand…”

金金金Having overheard them, she felt it would be an excellent opportunity to explain.

After clearing her throat, she haughtily began, “Ahem, in the military, rank is obviously present. Not only in Coimbra,

but also the other provinces. The system is shared by all of Horsheido.”

金金金First are the fodder. They are the conscripts drafted during a time of war. There is also a leftenant, but he doesn’t necessarily lead the men.; he would be only in charge of about ten. To be in command a hundred men or more, one must be of knightly status and the ranks are as follows: captain of one hundred; major, more prestigious than a captain, but in charge of as many men; colonel, in charge of one thousand; brigadier, the more prestigious commander of one thousand; and so on. Those were the usual numbers of soldiers that were assigned; however, things such as commanding five-hundred were not rare.

金金金The present situation made it difficult to ascend the ranks to general in any province. As there were no major wars being fought that was to be expected. A major general commanded ten thousand men, and the two in Coimbra were Wilm and Gaddis. The general was the viceroy, and above him was the emperor.

金金金Cynthia’s position over one hundred at the age of 20 was not because of her own abilities, but because of heredity. Her late father had been a major general. There was almost no other way for a woman to become a knight. Her older brother had died of illness while he was young and so there had been no one else to inherit the house, or their family name.

金金金For that reason, Cynthia had undergone rigorous training in preparation for her marriage. Wilm, Gaddis, and her late father had been good friends, and so she was looked after well. Although some of her affiliates spoke poorly of her behind her back, she continued on with all of her might.

“So, we’re simple soldiers?”

“You’re actually slightly lower than a regular soldier; basically an errand runner. What a great name volunteer soldier is. Ha ha ha, I’m sorry Mirut.”

“You’re one too.”

“I guess so.”

金金金Cynthia had not held back, and plainly stated some things that were not easy to hear. If they died, their names wouldn’t be remembered, and their families would receive no pension.

“The unfortunate one is you! First off, I only became a volunteer soldier because… ah, nevermind, sorry,” Mirut was halted by the glare of a nearby soldier.

“Don’t worry. Only that idiot needs to worry about her language. You don’t have to get used to it, I won’t be so harsh on a volunteer.”

“T-thank you very much!”

“I was just irritated.”

金金金Noel was snickering in the background. Her picture book was closed, and tucked safely away in a pouch hanging by her waist.

“It’s your fault!”

“Ah…”

“What is it all of a sudden?”

“Clouds came out so the beautiful moon was hidden.”

“True. If the fire went out it would be pitch black. Well, that would make escaping easier at least.”

金金金With his eyes drawn to the sky, he noticed the clouds had begun to drift. Perhaps it would rain. It would make their detection more difficult, cover their trail, and bog down their enemy. The rain would truly be a blessing, but there was someone present who disagreed.

“Rainy days herald rising horrors. It’s always like that, so I hate rain.”

“It’s like that then. I can tell from your face alone that you don’t like the rain.”

“Yup. Particularly, nightly rains are the worst. It’s something of a living hell for me, I guess.”

“You’re a dramatic one, eh?”

“It’s true, so it can’t be helped.”

金金金Having expressed herself, Noel wiped her face with a wet towel. As the dirt and blood washed away, for the moment, she was completely refreshed.

Translator’s Note:

Does anybody have any ideas on what to do with the Horsheido Military ranks? I assigned the ranks myself as the Japanese only specified the number of men under an officer’s command, and not a real rank…

In other news: the weekly release experiment begins. As both my translation speed, and endurance have increased while translating these past few chapters, for the next month I will attempt a weekly release, and if it proves feasible, I shall continue at that pace.

I coincidentally chose to do this on a month with 5 Saturdays. Although that makes it harder for me, I guess it is good for you guys.

Editor’s Note:

The translator is getting much better at translating, and also at editing his own stuff, which is quickly changing me from an editor to a simple proof reader.

< Previous Chapter | Index | Next Chapter >

Chapter 6: The Pledge of Two Hammers

金金金Cynthia's troupe avoided the conspicuous highways and instead stuck to the forest. Their progress had been slow as they only proceeded once the area ahead of them had been scouted and confirmed to be safe; once they had sufficiently distanced themselves from Rockbell, they could simply take the highway back to the capital. Cynthia was faced with the choice of fleeing quickly, or escaping cautiously, with her foremost priority being the protection of Grohl's wife and child. The heavy responsibility of fleeing a land which threatened death was ever pressing on her mind. In the centre of their formation were Sarah, Elgar, the guards, Cynthia, and, for some reason, Noel was also present. Although Cynthia had tried to drive the hindrance away, Noel had nimbly stepped out of her reach, and proceeded forwards. Not wanting to waste unnecessary energy, Cynthia resigned herself to pretend to not notice what she could plainly see.

金金金The rest of the soldiers, forming a circle around their charge, marched cautiously on, with their weapons at the ready. The volunteers, whose ability had yet to be confirmed, were placed in the rear of the formation. Even if they fell behind, they weren't going to be looked after. The man on point held a torch, and cleared the foliage to create a path, for without light, a journey by night was far too dangerous. To remain concealed, they ceased movements during daylight.

"…"

"Lady Sarah, young Prince, how are you feeling at the moment?" Cynthia asked as they walked.

金金金Sarah's face was haggard; her visage was distinctly fatigued. As they were executing a forced march that was enough to wear down experienced soldiers, that much was only natural. Unfortunately for her, they could not afford regular breaks. It meant death if the enemy caught up with them, so even if she had to be carried, the advance would not stop.

"I am fine; however, Elgar is a little tired."

Elgar made a face and spouted, "I'm fine too! Please stop treating me like a child!"

金金金His complaints about not being treated like an adult were decidedly childlike. Fixing his hair, Sarah gently patted his head. It was good that he didn't bemoan such a lengthy trek because he was a healthy young 12 year old boy.

"Sorry for that. You've grown into a fine man. You're gallant much like your father"

"Thanks!"

金金金Watching the two, Cynthia's expression softened. Although all seemed well, a foolish existence meandered into her field of vision. Before her eyes, Noel turned to face the scene with a burning curiosity. Their eyes met, and just as she was wondering what was so fun about the situation, Noel gave her a thumbs up.

金金金This idiot isn't finished yet!?

金金金The most vigorous of the entire party was Noel. Completely at ease, she moved with an easygoing attitude as though she was out for a stroll.

"Noel, your standing is not the same as these people's. Know your place."

“Why are we different?”

Cynthia looked down her nose at Noel and plainly asserted, “Why? Because you’re a pleb. The world of nobility is alien to you, let alone the world of the Waldek house to which Lady Sarah and the young prince belong. If it wasn’t for the current situation, you wouldn’t even be allowed to approach them!”

金金金On the continent, the plebeians were not allowed the honour of a surname. Only those of the knightly or noble class could take up such a name, and a knight had to at least be in command of one hundred men in order to chose a name. Nobles received their names through blood or money. It was possible to buy into a family as a new branch with a suitable investment. Cynthia was not only a knight, but also tentatively a lower ranking noble.

金金金That said, it is true that nobility is just a name. In fact, it even brings along its own troublesome baggage.

“I see, then nobles are super important right?”

“That’s how it is, so if you’ll just realise your standing…”

“Then, you’re important too?”

“Eh?”

金金金Noel had, without restraint, asked Elgar a question. Sarah, who was beside him, did not rebuke her, but rather, a confused look floated across her face. During peaceful times it would have been appropriate to shout in response to her insolence; however, the current situation did not allow for such social conventions.

“Did you even hear what I was saying to you Noel!?”

“Isn’t that right, young Prince, you’re super important too?”

“I, I think so. I am the man who will one day rule Coimbra, Elgar Waldek. You will definitely see me become great.”

“Then I’ll give you something good. When you do rise to prominence it will become your greatest retainer, so be sure to share your happiness with me too okay?”

“A… present? You want to become my subordinate, is that it?”

“Yup, after all, you’ll become great right? So here it is,” smiling broadly, Noel pressed something into the confused Elgar’s chest.

金金金It was the hammer which had earlier smashed the skulls of the Bahar soldiers. The weapon was too large for a child to easily wield; dried blood still adorned its head.

“What are you trying to give him!? Young Prince, you have no obligation to accept something like that!”

“I have one too, so now we match, see?”

金金金She took up the hammer she still had from behind her. After making a motion as if performing a toast, she whirled the hammer around. It was unmistakably what one of Ned’s subordinates had been carrying. At some point she must to have picked it up without anyone noticing. The criteria for Noel’s treasures were unknown considering the how hammer, which was in no way out of the ordinary, somehow qualified. It had proven highly effective in battle, but Noel’s skill had been more responsible for that.

“What made you decide to give this to me?”

“Because it’s the hammer that saved you and your mum. It might prove super handy later. Hey, can you see how it

could be a magical weapon?”

“Hmm, even if you say so, would that make it true? Somehow, it has good weight, and I think I could get used to wielding it.”

金金金While grasping it in both hands, Elgar raised an eyebrow. Obviously, because it was a hammer it held significant heft, and fabric was wrapped around the shaft to ensure a good grip. He accepted it even as it seemed he was still pondering whether or not it would be a good idea. Taking a string, she skillfully fastened it to his belt.

“Young Prince, please don’t keep such a filthy thing. That girl is a fool who doesn’t know the ways of the world, so you don’t have to play along.”

“My life was not saved by such a filthy thing. It is from the hand of a fool who doesn’t understand the world.”

“But!”

“Outer appearance doesn’t matter. What is important is whether or not you can use it now, or at a later time. Learn about the things surrounding you, that is how I gained some truly wonderful experiences.”

金金金Elgar stopped Cynthia with his hand, and turned to face Noel.

“Your name was Noel right?”

“Yup.”

“You have my thanks. I was unable to express my gratitude earlier. Volunteer Soldier Noel, thank you for saving me and my mother. You have my uttermost appreciation for what you have done.”

“It’s fine. In return, don’t forget about earlier, okay?”

“Okay, it’s a deal. I, Elgar Waldek swear to uphold my agreement with Noel. You have the oath of a noble, which will never be broken.”

“Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

“That’s great. I look forward to that time.”

金金金Noel and Elgar shared a happy smile as though they had completely forgotten how they were frantically attempting to escape an ever nearing doom. They did not heed the difference in social standing between the nobility and plebeians, but the time when discrimination fell by the wayside was only temporary, and the old ways would later return.

金金金Is it because he is still a child? No, he sincerely gave his thanks, and he was more adult about the situation than I was.

金金金Although she was uncertain of her own feelings, Cynthia’s life had also been spared. Without Noel, she would have surely died. Because of her useless pride, she had yet to give proper thanks.

“Elgar, where did you learn that manner of speech? I could have mistaken you for your father.”

“I have studied many things. I cannot remain a child forever.”

“I’m studying too. I have been in quandary over the discovery of interminable happiness. It’s been trial and error every day,” spouting difficult words, Noel expressed the ridiculous yet again.

金金金It was hard to decide whether or not she was truly an idiot.

金金金I don't understand. I don't understand her at all.

"Hmm, philosophy, eh? I will make sure to consider it later. Our castle's library contains many books. With enough searching I should be able to find what you seek."

"Really? Thank you, young Prince!"

金金金Eyes aglow, Noel grasped Elgar's hands while Elgar himself blushed in embarrassment. Whatever his expression was, from what Sarah could see, it seemed a happy one. At a glance they were both being children together; Noel the sister, Elgar the brother; elder and younger.

"Uaa…"

"… Could you please consider your position. That's right, when you understand, if you understand, say 'yes'."

"… Yes, I understand," Noel bowed whilst rubbing the cheek which had been pinched.

金金金The surrounding soldiers, and even Sarah, smiled at the exchange. Cynthia glared at the soldiers, and marched ahead of them.

金金金They continued on in silence for some time. Tree leaves rustled in the wind, and the the silence became intermingled with the sound of rain.

"Rain?"

"Yup, well this is the worst. A~h, seriously the worst."

"This is a fateful accident; a blessed rain. It should wash away our tracks."

"Well, I don't like it."

金金金Noel had twisted her face to the limit, and tutting, covered her head with a cloth. Even her speech had become irritated. She truly detested the rain; not even able to stand the feeling of its dripping on her, she consciously walked near the trees.

"O-oi, don't stray from the formation."

"It's fine, so leave me alone."

"What are you, a child?"

金金金While Cynthia was surprised she again became aware of the fear which she had once felt towards Noel. There was almost no remaining trace of the naive girl who had spoken to them before. Her detached character and shameless eccentricity had all but washed away in the rain that now caused her to hunch over, but the filthy clothes she still wore attested to the fact that the earlier scene had not been a lie. Her hair which was still red, now appeared like a stained pelt. Although the stench of blood was fading, it could still be sensed; the girl who acted appropriate for her age concealed a vicious, ruthless beast. From her innocence, cruelty could spring at any time, only to disperse as suddenly as it had appeared.

金金金I didn't think I had understood her, but this still took me by surprise. It was certain that she had been in the rebel army. With the way things have progressed so far, my fears will probably prove baseless, but…

金金金For the moment, she planned on thanking her if they made it back safely. Cynthia determined so in her heart. Up ahead, a lone soldier burst out before their formation. He was one of the scouts who had been sent ahead to investigate the situation in Rockbell. If reinforcements had already arrived, it was unlikely for them to have be repulsed by the rebels, but the news that he brought was of the worst possible situation.

“Rockbell has fallen! The traitors have pillaged it, and flames roared above the district!”

“It fell too quickly. Was the enemy force even large enough for that? I want a full report!”

“The enemy was unusually alert to danger, and I was unable to safely ascertain much information. It is unknown if Count Barel was able to escape to safety!”

金金金At the news, Sarah and Elgar made mournful expressions. Count Barel was probably already dead. Rockbell had low walls, and if surrounded could probably only survive several days’ incessant attacks. The danger was greater than usual considering that the rebels would continue, even if their leader was to die.

“I see, if the leader is an officer from Bahar it would be obvious for them to have the knowledge on how to properly prepare a siege. Damn those cowardly Baharans!”

金金金Most likely, the Red Circle Army had prepared siege equipment in advance, and had persistently attacked. It probably wasn’t too hard for them to breach the gates, and overthrow the minimal garrison stationed in Rockbell. Count Barel had probably attempted to break through the encirclement to escape, but failed miserably to meet a pathetic end. When the flags of the Red Circle Army were raised above Rockbell, they flapped in the breeze of a hellish scene of pillage and massacre.

“Knight Cynthia, whatever shall we do!?”

“We will carry out our mission! Whatever happens, we will escort you safely to Madress!”

金金金At the exact moment that Cynthia turned to encourage her soldiers, a large number of flaming arrows blazed through the darkness. In the rain, there was no way for the flames to spread, but the light revealed their formation.

“Shit! Why here…”

“They probably followed the scout back.”

金金金Just as Noel had guessed, the enemy approached from behind the scout. They had probably allowed him to leave with the intent of following him. Cynthia cursed her own carelessness as the enemy soldiers closed the distance.

“To think I doubted it! It’s probably these guys! Don’t let them escape!!”

“Absolutely make sure the woman and child remain alive! On Sir Ristih’s orders!”

“Yaaaah!!”

金金金With voices raised, the enemy descended upon them.

“Lady Sarah, young Prince, do not become separated from me! All right men, do not let them approach!”

“But, at this rate, their advance will crush us!”

“Silence! Do not break the circle! Just hold on!”

“See, I said it. Rainy days are the worst,” Noel muttered disgruntledly.

金金金Her tone was so harsh it was impossible to read the emotion in it.

“Now is not the time! Stop messing around and form up!”

“Hey, can I maybe borrow that fluttery thing? You can have mine in exchange.”

“Wai, what?”

“It’s fine, hurry up. If you want to die here, just do whatever,” coldly stating her mind, Noel roughly grabbed Sarah’s coat, put it on, and dressed Sarah in her own rags.

金金金Noel donned the luxurious coat, and took up her bag in her left hand. She wasn’t very tall, and so was unable to properly see her surroundings.

“Exactly what are you trying to do!?”

“I don’t have time to explain. If I do this well, be sure to reward me for it, okay? We’re in agreement then?”

金金金Immediately after finishing her words, Noel took up her bident, and ran into the forest. A roaring flame at the end of her bident, she held it high for the enemy to see. As she charged into the darkness, she cried out in a loud voice.

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa~~~~~~!!”

“What? A woman’s voice?”

“It’s a woman, she’s running away! It has to be Sarah! Catch her!”

“She’s carrying something! It’s probably the kid! All right, the reward is mine!”

“Oi, what about these guys!?”

“Ignore them! They’re just the remnants of a defeated army!”

金金金Chasing after the blazing light, all at once, the encirclement dissolved.

金金金So that’s it! She came up with that quickly! How reckless…

金金金Having thought that far, there wasn’t enough time to explain.

Raising her sword, she ordered, “Now is the time! Break out, on me!!”

“U-understood!”

金金金Having broken through the encirclement with all of her might, Cynthia had left the forest, and advanced as far as Coimbra’s Milan highway. Nearer to the capital, they confirmed that it was safe to march while flying the Coimbra flag. With that their mission was complete. Her legs like wooden clubs, barely managing to stand, Cynthia made her report.

“Somehow, we seem to have escaped. Quickly, send a runner to the advanced party.”

“A-are we safe? But, Noel…”

“Cynthia, and all you soldiers, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. That heroic girl as well.”

金金金Sarah closed her eyes. Elgar, breathing heavily, frantically checked his surroundings. They all knew without

him telling them that he was searching for Noel.

“Waiting for Noel is… no good after all?”

金金金Even though they had used a decoy, such a thing was not what they had expected to do. They had only thought to fight to the death, but such thinking could have only led to failure. The one who had paved the way to the success of their mission had not been a soldier, but that girl. It would be nigh impossible to escape alive when acting as a decoy in those circumstances. With so many pursuers it was only a matter of time before they surrounded her; furthermore, she was hunted by lustful traitors. They didn’t want to imagine her fate.

金金金At the least, it would be good if she died while maintaining her human dignity. I never was able to thank her for what she’d done.

金金金Cynthia had held on to her doubts right until the end despite having been saved by her twice. She felt like the worst kind of person.

“Ah, um, Knight Cynthia. Noel…”

“She was most likely captured or killed. Either way, it can’t have been good.”

“No way, there’s no way, she wouldn’t just simply die like…”

金金金Mirut stood still, unable to find words.

“Sorry, but at least we can inform the viceroy of her accomplishments. Her name and honour…”

“That doesn’t mean anything if she’s dead. Why… why did this happen!?”

金金金Interrupting his words, Mirut’s face revealed the tears that leaked out despite his turning aside. Perhaps he had harboured special feelings towards her. Not only the faces of the people from her village, but also the faces of the soldiers were darkened. Her slightly detached, bottomless positivity had at some point or another, captivated every one of them. Elgar, Sarah, and even Cynthia herself were included.

金金金Sadness doesn’t help anybody. I am this lot’s commanding officer. Unless I lead them all the way to the end of our mission, how will they fight?

金金金Cynthia unsheathed her sword, and stepped before the party.

“Thanks to the valiant efforts of Volunteer Soldier Noel, we were able to escape a land of death! We have brought Lady Sarah and the young Prince to safety!”

金金金To fix her voice which had become dry, she paused for a beat before continuing to express her feelings.

“Volunteer Soldier Noel, we pray that as you have laid down your life for the success of our mission, you will rest in peace with your fellow soldiers. Everyone, salute!”

金金金Cynthia held her sword before her, and the soldiers, in perfect order, saluted the forest. Sarah and Elgar offered up a prayer. It felt like the sun had impulsively showed itself. They had been running frantically, and so hadn’t noticed that the rain had stopped. With much weighing on her mind, Cynthia closed her eyes. After paying respects for about a minute, a sound was heard behind them. Worried something may have happened, Cynthia opened her eyes, and carefully turned around.

“Ei!”

“Pfflt…”

金金金Turning around, something thick was smeared on her. Something gritty entered her mouth. There was no mistake that it was mud.

“W-what!?”

“Don’t just kill people off like that. More importantly, it would be a massive waste to die on such a sunny day.”

“Y-you were alive!?”

金金金Mirut’s voice was a combination of surprise and joy. The other soldiers were the same.

“Yup, I won’t die in a place like that. Wait, did I miss out on a posthumous promotion? Does that even happen for volunteer soldiers? Like, would I have been a senior volunteer soldier? Hey, do those exist?”

金金金Cackling away, Noel patted Cynthia gently on the back. Rather than Noel dying horribly, she had tossed her opponents around like beanbags. Not only were the rebel’s pursuit troops chasing her in the dark, but the branches of the thick foliage had entangled their torches making it almost impossible for them to even see what they were after. The light at the end of her spear served not only to distract the enemy, but also to lead them into traps. She would sneak up on isolated men and gift them her hammer in the form of a single strike such that the number of bodies could not be said to be few by the time morning came. After waiting for the rain to cease under the cover of a tree, and having confirmed that the sun had come out, she walked the shortest rout to the highway. Having made her way to the rendezvous point, she found that the others had decided on their own that she was dead, and were even offering up a silent prayer in remembrance of her, so she had taken the opportunity to mess with them. She proudly explained the events which had led up to their current situation.

“T-this mischievous girl! I am, for the moment, your superior officer you know! I am a commander of one hundred men, and a member of the illustrious Coimbra Knighthood! What were you thinking to smear my face with mud!?”

金金金Indignantly wiping the mud from her face, which had flushed red, Cynthia had raised an angry voice.

“I have no excuses, sir! Um, I salute Captain Cynthia!”

金金金Noel stiffly saluted with muddy hands. The salute itself was as flawless as ever, but her expression didn’t match it.

“I won’t forgive you just because you started acting appropriately just now! When we get you to the capital, I’ll make sure you’re thoroughly educated!”

“As a volunteer soldier, I will show appropriate restraint! So I can receive my reward, let us make haste to return. I ran pretty fast to get here though, so I wonder if it’ll be okay to just continue like that even though I’m pretty tired…”

金金金Already bored of her performance, Noel released a large sigh.

“Silence! You are under my command now! That is what I have decided! We’ll beat that cowardly attitude out of you, and start again from scratch!”

“C-captain. That is a little excessive. Noel is still only a volunteer soldier you know.”

金金金Her subordinate advocated for restraint, and naturally, she ignored him.

“Silence! We shall meet with reinforcements! Follow me!”

“Help me~”

金金金Cynthia dragged Noel down the highway by the scruff of her neck. It was nearly impossible to see her as

being a soldier capable of easily defeating enemies, and safely returning. The soldiers were dumbfounded while watching the receding shape the two made.

“I-it would be pretty bad if we didn’t catch up…”

“Yeah…”

“Was the captain always like this? She always seemed more rigid, and irritable…”

金金金Cynthia had no friends who were of a similar age to her own. She had always been one to quietly train and angrily shout so as not to be made light of by the soldiers. Despite that, she managed to accrue great jealousy from her peers. For the soldiers, it was their first glimpse of the ups and downs that Cynthia had always experienced.

“True. But… she seems to get along with that girl. Don’t they seem like old friends?”

“I, I guess I can see that? Well, it feels like she’s been through a lot, at least the captain does.”

“That makes sense. I do have a good eye for people after all.”

Elgar glanced at the exited soldiers, and said, “Mother, we too should follow. The time to rest shall soon be upon us.”

“That’s right Elgar. Then let us make haste. Honoured men, please look after us until the end.”

金金金At Sarah’s encouragement, the soldiers assembled into their formation.

“Leave it to us!”

“It seems you are quite fascinated by that hammer.”

“Yes,” Elgar confirmed as he gazed after the distant Noel, “This shall be my treasure. To never give up a fight to the end, that is what this hammer has taught me. I wish to follow that example myself.”

“As I thought, that stupid woman won’t die even if she’s been killed.”

“You must be relieved Mirut.”

“Shut up. Well, I do feel better.”

金金金Embarrassedly wiping his eyes, Mirut smacked his mouth which had been loosely blabbering. It was well known how much Mirut cared for Noel. The others were even betting on whether Fraser, or he would fall for her first. He himself was the only one unaware of this.

“You really aren’t honest, eh? Well, we still aren’t finished with our job. I’m exhausted.”

“Yeah, after the rebellion is suppressed, I’ll surely head back to my village.”

“Do you think that Fraser and Kraft are okay? Even considering that they took Rockbell…”

“If things get bad, they’ll probably run. They aren’t too stupid.”

“That’s true, and man am I hungry.”

金金金Spouting such frivolous things, Mirut and the other villagers began to walk along the highway. Noel and Cynthia who had gone ahead, seemed to have already met up with the reinforcements.

金金金In Mirut’s heart, he felt that: *She really is an energetic one.*

Author's Note:

I will briefly introduce the provinces of the Libelika Continent:

- Coimbra: In the south west of the continent. It is widely acknowledged as weak in the event of war. Before bankruptcy, it held great wealth. It produced many artists. The viceroy is Grohl Wardka
- Bahar: In the central region of the continent, it is east of Coimbra. With no coast, it primarily profits through Ribeldam. It is famous for its strength. It was the last region to fall under the Sun Emperor Bergis, and has a culture that deeply values the art of war. The viceroy is Amil Wardka, younger brother of Grohl.
- Ribeldam: In the south of the continent, it is located east of Coimbra and south of Bahar. It has replaced Coimbra as a trading power. It has close ties to Bahar, and it has great pride in its navy.

Translator's Note:

The "Uaa…" was いひやい, which is, as far as I know, a distorted expression of pain made when Noel's cheek was pinched. "Ow." didn't seem right, and neither did "It huwts." so I went with a more generic sound.

Good thing I had this one done in advance, I managed to combo being sick and having allergies… On another note, I think I've managed to catch all the double spaces this time. Of course if I didn't, then somebody else (preferably the editor) will find them, so if you aren't reading this early, you'll never find my mistakes!

Editor's Note:

This is an editors note, as the editor, this note that is here is mine.

< Previous Chapter | Index | Next Chapter >

Chapter 7: Feast of the Fallen Beast

金金金Rockbell had fallen to the Red Circle Army. Broken bodies, smashed storefronts, haggard homes, and soaring smoke were left in the wake of past violence. The heads of the guards who had remained faithful to the end were strung up in the trees, and Sarah's father, Count Barel Ludwing was hung in eight pieces for all to see. Those who survived had not escaped the pitiful state which engulfed the town. Women and children were tormented, and prisoners of war were used to test new weapons. Vulgar laughter veiled shrieks and wails.

"Ah, this one fought back. It gets boring when that doesn't happen."

金金金It had been some time since Geb had enjoyed the stench of blood and madness, for him was the true pleasure of a fight. It marked every battlefield where life and death swiftly changed hands. It was a smell only known by the victors who survived. A single sniff could make one sick, so Geb willingly sought out the places of death.

"Heh, when I'm done with this, you'd better not have already had your fill. The best has yet to come."

金金金On the battlefield, instincts and greed were made bare, and fates collided. It was heaven for the victor, and hell for the vanquished. There was no class distinction there; of nobles, plebeians, and emperors, all were stripped bare. All that remained was the question of life or death.

"Hail comrades, are you having fun?"

"Y-yeah!"

"Then all is well. For things like this, enthusiasm is important. Do it to your heart's content. That said, if you still want to be able to play around with someone, is not moderation important too? There are still many replacements, but they won't all be so pretty."

金金金Geb called out to a youth who was bent over a young woman by the roadside. He himself was blending in with the mob quite well, but he had an important duty to fulfill. He'd have to restrain himself until such a time as it was complete, for, after all, he was a knight of Bahar. Without having his fill of the stench of the blood and smoke he walked down the street.

金金金Ah, how nice. These naive youths fall into vice, wreathed in desire. I love how human it is. Ethics and righteousness won't sustain one's life. Live as you please, and die when your luck runs out.

金金金Without thinking of the future, he put all his power into the present so that each moment could be enjoyed. He did not heed others. Setting aside the rebellion and other such things, he found it most amusing to simply live in the moment. Count Barel, who had been torn asunder, was no exception. His life had ended after squeezing taxes from his impoverished fellows to live a life of ultimate luxury. Despite the excruciating look in his eyes at his own demise, as his entire life had been one of opulence, he most likely regretted nothing.

金金金In comparison, the thought of an uninteresting life floated through his mind alongside the face of his commanding officer. He only ever revealed an air of constant complaining to his subordinates; he was a man who lived to obediently follow orders and rise to the top; he was Ristih.

金金金We are, Ristih is, vigorously working towards Madress' capture, but who knows how it will turn out? Either way, the stormy path is the most interesting one.

金金金Thinking such things as he walked, from a nearby house, he heard a pleasant voice. Hearing it, it sounded

as though it belonged to a young man. Whimsically peeking in, he recognised the face. It took the form of what had once been an upright youth.

“Ou, ou, you can do it after all, Fraser and Kraft. How about it, wasn’t it worth it to come with me?”

“I had no idea that it was so fun to take things that aren’t mine! Heh, ha ha ha!”

金金金Wine in hand, Fraser was waited upon by a girl who was in a stupor. Her father, who had protected her was, in a few words, already a corpse. The body’s head was, half in jest, kicked aside.

“That’s how it is, that’s how it is! Pillaging others’ belongings is the best. It’s even better when you take your foes greatest treasures, eh? It is the flavour only a victor can savour!”

“Even though Kraft was so scared before, look at how he’s doing now. Ha ha, she’s totally blue!”

“Young ones are like that. You’ll grow up to be something like me, and you won’t have to whine like children hoping to be bought treats. That is if you live long enough to get a good taste of it all.”

“…”

金金金Kraft was in a trance and didn’t respond to words. His hands which had been strengthened by working the fields were twisting a woman’s neck to the limit. She was the mother of the girl who was entertaining Fraser. Her eyes were wide open, but only the whites were visible, and her tongue hung pathetically from her mouth. She was more than likely already dead. Kraft had been overwhelmed by his carnal desires; the young man who had worried over others’ gazes had vanished. He had the face of a starved wolf, and Fraser, who was making fun of him, was much the same. They had already abandoned thoughts of their fellows from Coimbra. The people before them were not the detested nobility, but simple people of the town. Now the town had only two types of people: winners, and losers; looters, and looted; only those remained.

“Oi Kraft, isn’t that one already dead? How much longer will you play with her before seeking the company of another woman?”

“…”

“This is no good. You aren’t listening at all.”

“The others might become a problem, so don’t kill too many of them! Remember how to have fun without killing.”

“I get it!”

“Then we have no problems, do what you will!”

“Of course, I’ll do as a please! After all, we are the winners. Ha ha! We are the winners!”

金金金Fraser was in high spirits. Geb sprinkled some wine on Kraft who was still unresponsive.

“That’s the spirit Fraser. After this we’ll take the Milan highway and in one swoop, be upon the capital city Madress if it all goes according to plan.”

“S-seriously!?”

“Why of course. The prestigious nobility gathers there after all. They’ve been using the money from our labours to carelessly live their lives. Therefore, we must righteously collect the debts they owe the people as the Red Circle Army.”

“…Noble…”

“They’ll all be well dressed right? Their youngest daughters have continued in such a way all their lives, dressing their entire bodies in precious gems. They’ve never done hard labour so their hands are beautiful and soft, and their bodies are well formed and gentle. Not to mention how packed their houses should be with treasures. We’ll steal, and steal, and steal until we’re exhausted!”

金金金As Geb raised his voice, Fraser nodded with a smile. Kraft, despite his mania, furiously shook his head up and down.

金金金I love to see it when they completely fall like this.

“Ah, I know this is changing the topic but, this is about your buddies in the flying column…”

“Uh, so this is about the others who went with Mirut and Noel?”

“That’s right. I don’t know which way they went. Do you know anything?”

“I don’t know. They might have just gone back to the village. Ha, if they could’ve had this much fun by just waiting around, they really are idiots.”

金金金Fraser was vexed, but he imagined the forms of Mirut and the others. Noel’s face was the final thing to float through his mind. Comparing her to the girl who was beside him, he forcefully embraced her, and in that way he stole what was out of his grasp. For him it was simple: consent was unneeded for the winner. That was the order of things, and he’d do it again next time too.

“Oi oi, that’s not a very eager face. Young ones sure are nice, eh?”

“Did you need something from the flying wing?”

“No, it isn’t a big deal. With that, I’ll be on my way, later we’ll have a toast to our victory!”

“Yeah!”

“See you.”

金金金Raising his hand, Geb shut the door behind him, flexing his neck as though expecting an inconvenience. It was going to be troublesome what he had to report to Ristih, and things looked like they would become seriously annoying.

金金金Ah, such a bother. Stupid Ned, what happened to his ‘greatest feat’? Overworking and dying won’t help you know.

金金金Geb arrived at the largest mansion of Count Barel’s fief. The entrance was fortified and guarded by several soldiers who worked together to open the gate at Geb’s signal.

金金金In the Red Circle Army, Ristih, a Leader of One Thousand from Bahar, had secluded himself within the office. He had been pouring over the directive from Viceroy of Bahar, Amil Wardka for some time, and his expression was extremely grim.

“As of now we are to hold this position to buy time? We aren’t supposed to advance on Madress!? Where is the need to waste time indecisively!? Aaaah, this is no different from Falid’s suggestion, what an infuriating kid!!”

“Captain, I apologise for intruding whilst you were busy.”

“You’re late! When do you think I called for you!? Are the trashy plebs rubbing off on you, you bastard!?”

“Captain, we should stop speaking of trash. They are, for the moment, our allies.”

“What’s wrong with calling garbage what it is!?”

“Well, for the moment please remain composed. There are all kinds here. Ah, I have something to report on the search for Ned, and a report on Grohl’s wife and child.”

“Start with Grohl’s wife and child! They’ve been captured as planned right!?”

“Eh, well, we were able to pinpoint their location. The failures in the pursuit party lost them, and they completely escaped. We’ll have to postpone the plan to use them as leverage.”

“Shit! We can’t use the recruits from Coimbra after all! How did they escape when we were so close behind them!?”

“Well, the scouts were following regular soldiers after all. What else could be expected of former serfs? It’s true that Coimbra is full of pathetic soldiers.”

金金金The wife and child had been sent there in preparation for the uprising. The capture of the two was supposed to be flawless. That said, capturing them could only be good and so Ristih would have been grateful if it did succeed, but wasn’t too upset about how it failed.

“So, do you know where Ned went? We haven’t had contact from him yet.”

“We went to the fort that idiot Ned had been talking about, but all we found were some brutalised corpses.”

“Whose corpses?”

“Inside the fort, only Ned and the Baharans were found. They’d all been completely slaughtered. It was the doing of an incredibly prodigious soldier.”

“Hmm… so the woman and child were hidden there after all. It was Grohl’s family we were after, so an elite guard wasn’t entirely out of the question.”

“Although Ned was quite skilled, his opponent this time was on another level. This is Coimbra so there is a danger of underestimating them too much.”

金金金Two of the dead were missing their heads, and Ned had his top and bottom halves separated. There was no mistaking that they had been killed by a master; most likely one of the Coimbra Guard.

“If that’s true, I too will have to work on not underestimating them. We’re up against a powerful rival here.”

金金金Ned was somewhat frivolous but that did not diminish the impressiveness of defeating him; therefore, the new strategy involved selecting more ex-Coimbra soldiers. They might not be the most disciplined troops, but taking advantage of every possibility was the Bahar Military’s speciality. Geb’s rough words had been a result of his new responsibility of supervising the new additions. Ristih himself held some doubts, but had to follow Amil’s plan.

“There are traces of a battle near the exit of a hidden passageway. The remaining corpses were Coimbra soldiers, and the other three Baharans. It seems like the Baharans were targeted. One of the ones with Ned probably betrayed them and ran.”

“Do you think they still haven’t noticed the Bahar presence on their own?”

“Ned used to be in Coimbra’s army after all. If one of the Coimbrans there recognised him it wouldn’t be strange. At

that point if they hadn't been found out it would have been ridiculous."

金金金Geb had a devil's intuition and spoke his hypothesis. It was possible that Ned himself had accidentally said something about it although there were no traces of torture. To die instantly rather than risk giving up military intelligence wasn't uncommon.

"This has gotten bad then. If this spreads as a rumor it might bring down the Red Circle Army all at once. They are but a gathering of beasts after all."

金金金There was no definite proof. With any number of witnesses, the Baharans were all killed in action by the fort. Bahar had stuck to the shadows and would not likely be found out officially, but rumors needed no proof. From person to person the tale would be embellished until the Baharans had to lose their heads, such was the terror of a rumor.

"I wonder about that. When the people of the Red Circle Army triumph they taste blood and vice, right? After this they won't think too much of morals and justice. Don't make light of beasts on the scent of blood."

"That makes sense, I hadn't thought of that."

"What is important is to attack, attack, attack, and keep up the pressure. Move on to the next place quickly so as not to have to think on the depraved creatures."

金金金To conquer any place, with any number of troops, would display great power. Unfortunately, each battle would whittle away at the troops' morale. Particularly with the Red Circle Army, the possibility of it dissolving was ever present. If they woke from the stupor of beasthood, they would once again know the fear of death, and would likely act to spare their own lives; such was humanity.

"Earlier, from Bahar, a terrible directive was received. We're to stay in Rockbell and lengthen the time of the rebellion. The orders are to halt the advance on Madress."

"Those were some sudden directives… well, Amil is allowed to say what he pleases. But still, why now?"

"I bet that bastard Falid's been whispering nonsense into his ear. He's getting carried away just for being childhood friends with the inexperienced Amil! He's made himself a ghost of power!!"

金金金Ristih spat his words even as he concealed his jealousy. If the target of his abuse had been there he would have made it a shouting match. Ristih's king was Viceroy of Bahar, Amil Wardka. He was the most promising youth in the empire and was aiming to succeed the emperor. Ristih himself had accepted the wisdom in his bid, and had not only sworn an oath of loyalty, but was also truly allied to him in his heart. His only problem was with the redheaded Falid who had known Amil since childhood. Accomplished in both literary and military arts, attractive in both face and figure, proficient in both level-headedness and fortitude, he was grounded in perfection. Popular with soldiers, he steadily gained meritorious achievements, and rose in rank when the opportunity presented itself.

金金金Amil had already ascended to being a Senior Leader of One Thousand, surpassing Ristih. That he would rise to become a Great General, Viceroy, and ultimately Emperor was a popular opinion. After all, he was a product of Emperor Befnam's 'Operation Daybreak'. None doubted his competency. Falid would most likely become Amil's right hand man. Ristih could not accept that. For the past 20 years, it had been none other than Ristih who had worked to the bone. He had undergone many hardships and trained in the Bahar military which was famously difficult to please. Ristih had played a major role in the disruption of a dangerous rebellion before either Amil or Falid had been born.

金金金Bahar's acting Great General was close to retirement, and he strongly thought himself to be the one to take up the position. His goal was only natural. He didn't know much about operation daybreak, but he knew better than

to look down on the people who survived the suspicious project. For people of Bahar, their pride would not allow such a mistake. He had applied for leadership of the Coimbra rebellion in hopes of promotion. If he could brilliantly capture the capital, he'd receive the foremost of honours from Amil himself.

金金金I will make Coimbra fall! Don't think you can get in my way Falid!!

金金金That which was before his eyes was something he had to bear. Successfully concealing his murderous thoughts, Ristih slammed his fist onto his desk. It was true, however, that if the war bogged down, it would provide pretext for the Bahar military to intervene. They would suitably resist, and eventually capitulate so that Grohl's responsibility for the situation could be investigated. It was certainly an easily attainable goal, but if he only did that much, he wouldn't be accomplishing any meritorious deeds. Conversely, if the Red Circle Army smashed the capital, Grohl's inefficiency would most likely be called into discussion. After that, when Bahar intervened, the rebels would honourably surrender the castle unto them. Then the Red Circle Army would be painted as the bringers of justice, with their leader Ristih becoming a hero. It might make his path to Viceroy of Coimbra more than just one of dreams; his fame would echo throughout the world.

金金金For the moment, the current plan was received from the most influential man in the Horsheido empire. Amil had contacted the emperor with his plans in advance. To preemptively carve out a cancerous growth, he wished to remove his own older brother from his position of power. Having learned of the proposal, the Emperor made a snap decision, and left Amil with the directive to show off his own prowess. It was a test to see if he was worthy of becoming the next emperor. Success would mean Amil's inauguration as crown prince.

"So then, captain, what shall we do? If we stay here, we won't be able to fully repair the walls. Not only would it be a great feat of endurance, but we'd also need to import high quality materials."

"I know that, our original plans called for the toppling of Madress. Our opponent is the stupid Grohl in the weak Coimbra, and we even have those who betrayed him. We can't influence the war much with only a few competent people. If I was in command, we'd most certainly win. We're only a small force, but it would hardly be difficult!"

金金金During the unification wars, the Bahar province fought soldiers from the Gemb province who were led by the Sun God, and fiercely resisted; the weight of history on their shoulders. The Baharan cavalry was mightier than the Sun God who knew of defeat that day. Although the fortunes of war had not favoured them, and they eventually were forced to surrender, that their resistance had been the most effective on the continent was soon widely known. For such reasons, they still greatly revered that resistance, even during the time that Amil became viceroy, they maintained their vigilance.

金金金In one step, Coimbra, with its goods and soldiers, was defeated, and it surrendered quickly. There were still legends of Coimbrans begging for their lives pitifully; their sorry nature and the scorn that came with it bought them a new fame. It was a country that, whilst frivolously passing the time, was crushed by the violent wars brought down upon them by the Sun God. 'They may have gold, but they don't have men,' were words describing the state of Coimbra. For Ristih, who was from Bahar, Coimbra was hardly a thing to be feared. All the more when they were led by the likes of Grohl.

"In short, is it alright to continue preparations for the march?"

"Of course! Don't worry about the homeland, when we take the capital, without a doubt, we will contact Amil and present it to him!"

"Then choose the men who are suitable for leadership and gather them up. Return with a report when you are finished."

金金金Geb, whose emotions were written across his face, diligently saluted and left.

金金金If security is truly one's greatest enemy, we must work diligently to turn that threat aside. Let me see, that's right, we'll have to do it well. Even against the incompetent Grohl, and the weak Coimbra military, the majority of our forces are from Coimbra as well. So long as they are humans, they can't be too different.

金金金That way of thinking was also important. It was unclear if Ristih who had raised a rebellion and taken it pillaging to the uttermost limits would actually hand over the province to Amil. If he performed poorly, he was to be cut off like the tail of a lizard. He may not have yet realised that fact, or he may have been pretending not to know.

金金金While roughly stroking his beard, Geb decided that he would sort out the lordly affairs later. Now that his task had been completed, he'd seize a woman, and drown his sorrows in wine. If his forces failed later it didn't matter.

金金金Well, as I thought, the captain will have to take responsibility if this fails. It will all end if I just say that it was Ristih's plan all along. That's a good trick for living longer.

金金金He remembered the face of Noel who had asked him about the methods of achieving happiness. He didn't know where she was, but had the feeling that the next time they met, it would be as foes. It was his soldier's intuition. Ned was close to a victory of his own when he met his tragic fate. In other words, it was not good enough to ascend to near perfect victory.

"Ah, I didn't get to teach her the full meaning of it all. Next time we meet, I'll properly tell her."

金金金Even victory is mere vanity when death arrives. For Geb, surviving was a victory. Be it winning and living, or simply surviving, both were the same.

金金金What I think, is that avoiding death is a win. So as not to die, one must fight, and acquire money. That's the trick to living with happiness.

金金金He made a mental note to tell that to Noel before she died. If he were to be called a liar on the verge of his own death, it would make his chances of awakening lower.

金金金Fraser, from the same village, would likely be pin Noel down by force. When she saw how he and Kraft had become, he wondered how she would react. Geb's heart leapt as he imagined the ways in which her aloof and noble face would contort when confronted with the situation. Whether she would cry, be enraged, or fall into despair, he had no clue. Either way it would be entertaining.

"Ah, I'm really looking forward to that."

Coimbra, Madress Castle.

金金金The castle's west bank transitioned into a beach, and a large harbour was built there. In all other directions sprawled vast swaths of castle town, and many wonders remained from its days as the largest trade city of the continent. It was largely unaffected by the ramshackle defences, and wanton destruction of the war. The northern mines had run dry, and the trade with Mundonovo had been interrupted, yet as long as there were people and food, trade would continue. The rebellion may have even driven refugees into the city. With the approaching crisis directly in front of their eyes, the people did almost nothing out of the ordinary. A result of this was the capital appearing fairly prosperous.

"So this is Coimbra province's Madress. It really is a massive city."

“Now isn’t the time to be leisurely. We must quickly make our report to the viceroy. The situation is urgent.”

金金金Cynthia poked Noel with a stick. A messenger had already delivered the basic information, but the circumstances obligated them to report the details of the situation in person. When they had joined with the reinforcements, the news of Rockbell’s fall had already been reported. The commanding Great General Gaddis had been unexpectedly cautious about the number of enemies, and he was already planning for his own retirement. Though they rushed on the way to Rockbell, it had already fallen by the time they had arrived, and its lord was already dead. So when they had successfully retrieved the viceroy’s wife and child, who had been saved from the worst of it, they felt no need to hurry back. A party in their rear was serving as a screen for the main body. Cynthia’s own party had joined up with the main force, and in several days time had returned to safety.

“So then be sure you come back. When I’ve returned, I’ll receive my reward okay. That was the promise you know.”

“What are you talking about, you are coming too. You are the one who killed Ned, and you’re also a witness to his talk about Bahar. You need to report to the viceroy from your own mouth th…”

金金金Cynthia cut off her own words after only getting that far because Noel’s presentability had become horrible. She was wearing armour as the reinforcements had not prepared any spare woman’s clothing. They weren’t a part of the expedition and so their resupply had been minimal. As expected they had prepared a lovely set of clothes for Lady Sarah, but there was no portion for Noel; they did manage to secure her some underwear however. The current Noel was wearing a bloodstained leather cuirass, a bident was on her back, and a war hammer was dangling from her belt. They had tried to rinse her off on the way back, but in the end were unable to fully erase the blood and grime.

“Hey, would it be alright if I took a little stroll through the city? There are all kinds of things to look at, and I feel like there will be many treasures to be found.”

“No. First off, we’ll have to change your clothes. Do you think you can see the viceroy dressed like that?”

“I don’t really need to meet him though. It seems like a pain.”

“Ah, be quiet! Just follow me!”

“Ah, um, what are we supposed to do?” Mirut nervously asked as the other villagers gathered behind him with similar expressions.

“For the moment, you’ll be led to the barracks. It would be best if you ate there, and recuperated. Once you’ve calmed down, be sure to think about what you plan to do from here on out.”

“What to do?” Mirut and the volunteers made confused faces.

“Whether you will stay like this, or return to your village. That place is still within the rebel army’s sphere of influence right? You will probably have to fight the remaining rebels before you can properly return.”

“No way! We won’t even be useful!”

“This province isn’t wealthy enough to support people who do nothing. The city may seem lively at first glance, but the reality is not so rosy.”

金金金Having finished her harsh words, Cynthia turned on her heel, highhandedly dragging Noel along with her.

金金金Arriving at the officer’s barracks, Cynthia made her way to her room. It was the prepared residence for all officers in charge of more than one hundred men. Different from the regular barracks, it had private rooms and a more sturdy construction. Originally she had lived in a mansion, but as the Edrich house didn’t have the income to

afford a servant, when she had become alone, she sold the estate. It was incredibly lonely for her to live alone in a large mansion, and so she moved into the barracks during her training. Although she knew it would give her the reputation of a fallen noble, as the entire province had fallen on hard times, she didn't mind it. She half smiled, half grimaced at her situation.

"This is my room, hurry up and enter."

"Excuse me."

"It isn't like I don't own anything so be sure to show some restraint. Quickly get changed, and we'll head off to the castle."

"I, I get it so let go of me please."

金金金Noel had entered the room having been dragged in. She saw a fluffy seeming, pure white bed, a frugal desk, and a large wardrobe. Beside it hung things like helmets and armour. Somehow finding herself worked up, Noel flung herself to the bed she was facing. Regrettably, her hair was caught, preventing her from reaching her fluffy goal. Just before the bed, she was held back. Having been pulled from behind, her head was at a strange angle, and she stopped there for some time.

"It hurts, you know."

"Well, I don't want you flinging yourself onto the bed with your current appearance."

"Its fluffiness is making me tired."

"Your biggest mistake was being so horribly dirty! You idiot!!"

"Can I sleep for a little while?"

"No!"

金金金Being forcibly held back by Cynthia's hands, Noel made small unconscious noises as she made longing eyes at the bed. She swore to any god that was listening that she would succeed in her second attempt, although she would most likely never be forgiven for doing so. As she feared, there was no god.

"Ah, my head might break."

金金金Although Noel complained, Cynthia was hearing none of it.

"You aren't employed by the military, but for the moment why don't we put you in a military uniform? You did participate as a volunteer soldier. This is one I received when I was only in charge of about ten. It's a bit long though…"

金金金Saying that, she handed over a white uniform. It wasn't the uniform of a high rank, and so had no shoulder strap; however, it did have the Coimbra scale. The trading city had a proud insignia. One side held golden coins, and the other weighed goods. Cynthia had been quickly promoted to leading one hundred, and so her uniform from her time in charge of ten was as good as new. Although they wore armour on campaign and on the battlefield, the uniform was used for all other occasions, and in recent years hardly any battles, or even bandit subjugation, had occurred.

"Um?"

"I'm only lending it to you. We are meeting the viceroy, and cannot do him any discourtesy."

“I understand. Hey, these are good looking clothes. Don’t they have good style?”

金金金Saying such things, Noel threw off her dirty garments. Although she should have had some trouble with an outfit she was unused to, Noel managed to quickly and nimbly change into it. She didn’t at all look like the sort to have practice with that kind of thing, so how she managed it was mysterious. She dressed not with the fumblings of a new recruit, but like a recently promoted female officer. With a serious expression, and a gallant air, she inclined her head after she was fully dressed.

“Hey, do I look good?”

“Y-yeah.”

金金金Cynthia watched without thinking as Noel approached the desk and took something in hand. What had been drawing her gaze, she without hesitation took up in a tight grasp. They were the glasses worn by Cynthia’s late brother. Not like a person taking a souvenir, but rather more like an abandoned child, she appreciated the frame.

“Take that, and tie my hair behind my head. There, do I look good?”

金金金Wearing the black rimmed glasses, with her hair tied behind her head, she turned around. From every angle she looked like military personnel. She appeared to be an efficient secretary or staff officer. Anyone who didn’t know who was inside that shell would easily be deceived. Even knowing what was inside it, Cynthia felt she was being fooled somehow.

“…”

“Um, this time…”

“What is this, you suddenly straightened up.”

“Sir Cynthia, your orders. The preparations are well in order.”

“W-what is this all of a sudden…”

“There is nothing particular about it, it is just my way to cope. Please leave everything to me. Well then, excuse me for today.”

金金金With a sage expression, in the manner of a bureaucrat, she pushed up her glasses, turned, and briskly left. For Cynthia, this was the biggest shock of them all.

“W-wait! Don’t just deal with this on your own! And what’s with those glasses!?”

“Aw, and I thought it was going well.”

“Appearance is good and all, but you need to do something about your inner self! You idiot!”

金金金Cynthia shouted, and Noel covered her ears with both hands. The grossly inappropriate stance she took whilst in the form of a reliable staff officer gave birth to a whole new type of unease for Cynthia to feel.

“Hey, more importantly, can you give me these glasses?”

“What are you saying all of a sudden?”

“Because I was going to get a reward. I think these glasses are really pretty.”

金金金Wavering for but a moment, she decided that there was no reason not to, or rather, as it wasn’t expensive she had reason to rejoice. If she didn’t honour the deal, there was no telling what Noel would do, but it was certain she

would do something; maybe even involving a hammer in one hand, and a bident in the other. Flashing her teeth, Noel attempted to drive her into a corner. Without realising it, shivers ran down her spine, and to clear her thoughts she coughed.

“I would like to say that it is no good, but a promise is a promise. Do what you will.”

“Yes! I’ll treasure it. With these on, I look smart right? They’re glasses that make me smart, the curious glasses.”

“Oi, don’t tell me that’s why you put them on…”

“Yup. The world looks amazing. It really is clearly visible now.”

金金金Cynthia was going to tell her that of course the glasses would do that, but they had little time.

“That’s good. While you were fiddling around we ran out of time, so hurry up and go. I’ll warn you in advance: do not say anything rude to the viceroy. I will only speak in response to questions.”

“I get… no, I understand Sir Cynthia. Please leave everything to me.”

金金金With her manners prepared, her body felt itchy.

“Please stop making fun of me. Next time I think I’ll pinch your cheek again.”

“Why? I even used proper speech…”

“Silence, I absolutely will!”

“It can’t be helped then. I get it Cynthia.”

金金金Arrogantly patting her shoulder, Noel walked ahead by herself. Even the Great General couldn’t match her confidence. Sitting a moment longer, half in protest, Cynthia yet again released a sigh, unable to understand Noel, she stood up and followed after her.

Translator’s Note:

I made the mistake of giving myself a sick day and rediscovered the art of procrastination. That said, I beat my previous record for most translated in a single day. There may be some errors as a result.

Editor’s Note:

Every day is a sick day for me when the translator isn’t translating. Six Thousand Words.

< Previous Chapter | Index | Next Chapter >

PsychoBarcodeTranslations

The capital of Coimbra, Madress Castle.

金金金Grohl's jeering echoed through the room during the audience. The red faced middle aged man who knelt before him was none other than the commander of the punitive force, Gaddis. His social status was equal to Wilm's and he was a reliable man due to his aptitude for effective strategies.

"You fool! Why did you think I sent you ahead!? Was it not so you could protect Rockbell from the rebels!?!?"

"With all due respect, viceroy. We had to clear a path for each day's march. With the time we had, nobody could have made it before Rockbell fell."

金金金Gaddis seemed like he was on the verge of anger, but he desperately endured whilst explaining his actions. He was insulted by a young man who had never before commanded troops in front of the other retainers, face strained as his pride as a commander was wounded.

"Is that the way a commander of ten thousand speaks!? What I was asking was why you didn't recapture Rockbell! You failure, nice try flapping your tongue into excuses!"

"Then I will tell you. Count Barel was already dead, and the population was completely suppressed; however, the silver lining is that we were able to rescue Lady Sarah and the young prince. It was best to immediately fall back and prepare for the coming rebels. A prolonged forced march would only tire out the men, and I made the decision to avoid an unsustainable assault."

金金金Gaddis had only been in control of three thousand, and the Red Circle Army had around five thousand. They could get reinforcements from elsewhere in the province, but there was also a need to consider the fatigue of the men, and the fortified enemy. Their opponents had also proven to be much more effective in battle than what had been anticipated from the disorganised rabble that they were. Grohl only half-heartedly acknowledged that. All he wanted was to see the rebel forces retreat. It was unknown how far from reality his thoughts were. Causing a rebellion was the greatest shame, and the highly conceited Grohl could not bear it.

"What pathetic reasoning. It is under your command that the Coimbra military gained a reputation for weakness. Listen well, Elgar, this cowardly senility must never be tolerated!" he firmly declared to comfort Elgar who was not looking well beside him.

金金金To prepare the twelve year old who was to one day become the viceroy, he sometimes participated in meetings. So as not to damage relations with Gaddis, for he did not yet know him, and not knowing what to say, Elgar responded ambiguously. On the other hand, Gaddis had already been insulted, and had his explanations spat upon. His cautious approach had not been in self interest.

"Viceroy, please wait! I have not behaved as one who has lost his nerve! To ensure our victory I…"

"Next up are our soldiers! I don't need a commander who hesitates like a brigand! You should retire!"

"Viceroy, that isn't…"

“How verbose!”

“Yes my lord.”

金金金Grohl roared, interrupting Gaddis’ words, sending him back to the end of the row of retainers which had lined up. Everyone could see that he was trembling with rage and shame as he quickly strode to his place. After checking on Gaddis with a sidelong glance, Wilm took one step forward and gave his report.

“Viceroy, here is the guard responsible for bringing Lady Sarah to safety, Commander of One Hundred, Cynthia Edrich. This is the report of the aforementioned situation. Would it be acceptable to summon her?”

“Yes, I don’t care. Hurry and bring her.”

金金金Grohl nodded, and the guards opened the solemn door for Cynthia who tensely entered with Noel. At the meeting, only the most high ranking officials of the province were allowed to be there so Cynthia had no experience in such lofty affairs. The lowest among them were senior commanders of one thousand, and so proposing anything was absolutely forbidden. Present were the two at the top of the military, ones who could directly advise the viceroy, Gaddis and Wilm. There could even have been officials capable of hastening promotions. In the first place, all those with direct access to Grohl had already been awarded great things in the past. What ruined Cynthia’s mood was that any one of them could lightly remove her from her position.

金金金They were there under the pretext of explaining the situation, but it may have been about questioning the guard’s ability to protect the woman and child. It was as nerve wracking as her first time accompanying the quiet Sarah. For the eldest son of the great house of Waldek, the one who was once the first in line for the throne, worrying whether he would respond positively or negatively caused Cynthia to become stiff. Conscious of the gazes from the line of retainers, Cynthia walked before Grohl and dropped to one knee. Noel too, took up a similar attitude from slightly beside and behind her. There was a vague sense that she was having fun, but for the moment it was subdued.

“C-Cynthia E-e, Edrich, Co-Commander of One Hundred. T-tasked with the important duty of protecting Lady Sarah and the young prince, the c-c-clumsy mismanagement of…”

金金金The tightly wound Cynthia’s rapid words were interrupted by Grohl’s sarcastic laugh.

“Wait, wait. We aren’t here to question the responsibility of your guards. Although Sarah did suffer a wound, she was returned safely, and my son Elgar returned with no serious wounds at all. Do not be ashamed of your Edrich house as I have heard that you did a praiseworthy job. You have done justice to the term guard.”

“A-a, ah, I, I, I most humbly accept your honourable words!”

金金金She desperately fumbled her way through expressing her gratitude. Now that the fear of being held responsible for any failures had passed, Cynthia took a deep breath to calm herself down.

“Now then, you seem to have something to directly report to me. Don’t hold back, tell me.”

“Yes, the truth is, um, that is, at Se-sepdef fort, th-the one called N-Noel, that is, um, ah, sh-she…”

金金金The words she had gathered up to summarise the events became intracranial butterflies, leaving the words flowing from her mouth unintelligible. She knew that the retainers were leaking smirks, and furthermore she hadn’t a clue why it was happening to her. For some reason her surroundings began to spin, and from one knee her body began to tremble. Checking again, her mouth still wasn’t working correctly. The figure of Grohl raising an eyebrow in her field of vision caused the world around her to spiral even faster as despair filled her very being.

金金金Seeing this, with a stern look, Wilm warned, “Cynthia, Commander of One Hundred, there is nothing to be so

nervous about. This is about the events which happened earlier, now is the time to report to the viceroy. You are an honoured member of the Coimbra military, be proud as a person of knightly status. Regardless of the situation it is unbecoming to lose composure!”

“Yes sir, of course!”

金金金Although she had answered with vigour, her mind was already blank. Just what exactly she was to say, or where she was to go with it, she had absolutely no idea. Normally she would have carefully prepared her report before hand, but getting Noel presentable had taken all of her available time. With things having turned out how they had, she regretted not writing what she needed to say down beforehand. Boiling inside her head were desperate attempts to formulate summarial sentences. Nothing settled at all.

金金金Several, no some tens of seconds later, as the dreaded silence flowed through the room, somebody lightly patted Cynthia’s left shoulder. Turning to look without thinking, she saw Noel, with glasses on, quickly wink with an elated expression.

“With her fear, I find myself worried about Sir Cynthia’s ability to report; however, it contains some things which must be said. Would it be acceptable, therefore, if I received the honour of continuing?”

“Who might you be?”

金金金Noel answered Wilms question after saluting.

“Sir, I was promoted to volunteer soldier by Sir Cynthia, I am Noel from the village of Zoim. So that the viceroy would reward us for our actions, I took command of the other villagers and we hastened to join the Coimbra forces. For convenience, I have temporarily borrowed the uniform of one in charge of ten. Please forgive me of this much.”

金金金Noel stated a heavily embellished version of the truth. Cynthia could only widen her eyes as she wondered from whose mouth did that statement come. Elgar, who understood the situation, found his mouth ajar as he was made speechless in shock. It was unavoidable that she looked like a completely different person. At first he hadn’t even recognised it was Noel. With her characteristic red hair, and facial expressions, there was little doubt that it was her. It was the real Noel, but that only confused him even more.

“There is no problem with that, but this means we now have volunteer reinforcements if that is the case. It is difficult to suddenly believe that though. Is this true Cynthia?”

金金金Grohl had a doubtful expression. He was aware of how unpopular he was with the populace. It wasn’t only Grohl, but the lined up retainers and civil officials all made similar faces for it was a well known fact that Grohl did not enjoy the trust of his people.

“I-it is. Um, well, without mistake, it is true.”

金金金It was most likely true, as given how nervous Cynthia was, she would have most likely confessed had it been false. She couldn’t bring herself to say that they had once been rebels but due to the circumstances had happened to switch sides. Furthermore, even though she felt about to burst, her mouth would not say that she had lost in single combat to the northern girl. If word got around that a commander of one hundred lost a fight with a commoner, the already poor reputation of the Coimbra military would further plummet, so with heart wrenching thoughts, Cynthia continued in the her big lie. For Cynthia who was not a person to tell lies, it showed in the form of pain on her face, but fortunately nobody noticed.

“What a thing to say. Among the province, not all of the people were ungrateful? Did you hear that Wilm?”

金金金At the news of unexpected reinforcements, Grohl’s expression unexpectedly loosened. He knew most of the populace hated him. He had exhausted himself trying to reverse the situation, but all of his efforts had backfired.

Grohl’s temperament was unfortunate, but a tyrant he was not. Whether or not he was any good at governing was another matter, however.

“Yes. Your continued benevolence and governing has reached the hearts of a few of the people. This Wilm is most impressed. This is surely the proof that we have been on the correct path.”

“I had continued to fight the rumors that the Sun God had not blessed us, but this seems to have helped a little. Now, Noel, exactly what was it that Cynthia was too nervous to report? I don’t mind, tell me without reserve.”

“Sir, this is a report on the high probability that Baharans are participating in the current rebellion.”

“What was that?”

“For that reason, Sir Cynthia has hesitated so. Whatever happens, it is an important matter to report.”

金金金At Noel’s words, in one moment, the room filled in an uproar. For an instant, Grohl’s face went pale, then his expression changed and he stood.

“Baharans! So the Baharans, no, Amil is behind this rebellion!?”

“Don’t do anything rash! Our relations with Bahar may be chilly, but we are still brethren serving the great Horsheido empire! So why can they not help but attempt to deceive us!? Noel, you had better not be lying!”

金金金As one officer raised his voice, instantly, the civil officials rebutted.

“But if we rethink our relations, we have nothing to gain! It is no lie that we have put great efforts into relations before!”

“Can you quiet down!? Viceroy, please calm yourself! Noel, state the grounds for what you have said! This is a place for the viceroy and high ranking officials, if what you have said is something like a lie or a joke, that is inexcusable!”

金金金After turning to the room and raising his voice, Wilm gave Noel a stern glare.

“T-this is m-my turn to report!”

金金金Cynthia rose and stood. After all the noise had lifted, it became possible to think calmly. Nervously, but without error, she explained what had happened up until that point. Although she was pushed to the limit, the rebels had advanced on the unknown Sepdef fort. Among them was Neddicas, who had been in charge of ten in Coimbra, but had fled to Bahar and several of them had Baharan accents. It was something he had not only attempted to kill Cynthia to keep secret, but also some of his own subordinates.

“How could they? As I thought, any way you look at it, this is Amil’s doing! How vulgar of him to attempt to trick his own elder brother to his own advantage! He brings shame to the great house of Waldek.”

“Please wait! It is dangerous to trust what they have said. It is mere speculation that Bahar is behind this all, we don’t have any definite proof!”

金金金Wilm risked his life to ease the tension. What Noel and Cynthia were saying was completely true, but he could not afford to overlook it. Normally that kind of thing would not be instantly believed, but Grohl was different.

“Definitive proof you say? So far this has all been enough reason to believe it though! What do you think they’ve been doing up until now!”

金金金The one who had taken trade with the southern islands from Coimbra in conjunction with Ribeldam had been none other than Amil. On top of all that, it had been recorded by their father Befnam, further spoke against Amil.

Because of that, he had lost his place as next in line for the throne, and gained instead infamy. Even though he was his younger brother, he held a hatred for him that could not be sated even by killing him many times over.

“Viceroy, we do not need reckless action. I don’t understand from where you have heard of this.”

“I am Emperor Befnam’s son, his firstborn Grohl Wardka! Why hold back for my brother!?”

“Pardon me. I had simply wanted definitive proof, would it be acceptable to capture the rebel leader Ristih? He should without a doubt have some information. He may even be a knight from Bahar.”

金金金At those simple words, Noel’s mouth curved in amusement. Her expression which was overflowing with confidence did not look like one of a volunteer soldier, but rather like a tactician watching a well planned trap sprung. Her glasses gleamed in the light, reflecting a subtle radiance. She had an intimidating air which was not at all like one of a young girl.

Wilm, however, unexpectedly responded under the pressure, “Just one soldier, no, a commoner shouldn’t speak like that! The Bahar province is famous, vigourous and has great fortitude, its military even has dauntless courage. That respect is impossible to attain through lies! Do not speak so poorly of Bahar’s ruling Viceroy Amil!”

“Whoever our opponent is, they will obviously have to take responsibility for it. We will capture Ristih and torture him until the truth is brought to light. There will be no problems. He will be judged for his sins,” speaking thus, Noel again took a knee.

“It is as Noel has said. Once Ristih is captured, everything will be made clear. If what she says is true, she will be rewarded!”

“V-viceroy!”

“Wilm, firstly Rockbell must be recaptured. You can also come with me. Have the troops been fully assembled?”

“Y-yes, sir!”

“Gaddis, I entrust the defence of the capital Madress to you! A second failure is not allowed, carefully carry out your duty !”

“U-understood, sir!”

金金金Gaddis expressed his comprehension and left the room.

“Cynthia, thank you for your good work. I will be sure to reward you later. From now on, I expect you to work hard for the sake of Coimbra.”

“I apologise for my earlier manner of speech!”

金金金Cynthia bowed deeply. She was full of relief that her audience was coming to a close. Nothing could compare with how she felt.

“Now, Noel, from what I’ve seen, you are a rather self-respecting individual. If you are okay with it, would you like to become a leader of ten in the Coimbra military? Of course there are no problems with wanting to return to your old life in the village. We would compensate you with a different reward that way.”

“I would love to, thank you very much.”

“Then you may retire for the day. You’ve done a great service.”

“Yes, sir. Then shall we go sightseeing, sir Cynthia.”

金金金Removing her glasses, loosening her expression, Noel reached out to Cynthia’s hand. It was an elegant motion as though offering her a dance. Cynthia scowled as she took the offered hand and stood, and the two of them left the room together. Watching them leave, Grohl forgot his earlier rage, and found himself laughing unexpectedly.

“This world sure has some strange girls. Don’t you agree, Wilm?”

“Yes. I have never seen ones like this before, such is the nature of humanity. I’ve lived a long life, eh?”

“To match you, a dignified great general, she’s a courageous one. Didn’t she also seem capable and intelligent? She is a truly interesting girl.”

“Remember that as we do not know her history, we must not let our guard down. I cannot think that she is a simple village girl. For the moment, caution is necessary.”

“I get it, I get it, you’re overanxious, aren’t you.”

金金金While outwardly responding to the conversation, Wilm’s inner thoughts kept strong vigilance. It would be easy to underestimate her as a simple young girl, but he felt from her an unpleasant premonition. Her eyes which seemed to think well beyond her years, carried a sense that they saw through all. There were times when Wilm had to change his mind. After fifty years of life, he had become perceptive and hardworking, and he had cultivated his eye for people. It was that sense which was violently ringing alarm bells. He had to be sure to absolutely never be deceived by her appearance. It was highly likely that under a human’s skin, something else lurked inside of her.

金金金But, how much of the plan did she discover, and what could a mere leader of ten do? Without bringing along social status with her, her work could never accomplish much.

金金金As though to vomit out his unease, he breathed deeply to calm himself down. If he could somehow bring her over to his side that would be good. From what he saw she would be the type to understand what he had to say. She seemed to be of the type to take advantage of anything profitable. That type of person would never board a sinking ship. They would not value high morals, justice, or other such things.

金金金The most troubling ones were those obsessed with hatred. That type wouldn’t listen to words, and could at any time do something unnecessary, often aggravating situations. The best example he could come up with was the viceroy Grohl. While thinking to himself, Wilm’s cold gaze looked out before him.

“It seems that the meeting has ended. Everyone, we don’t have much time, hurry and prepare for the day we take the field. Our next battle must absolutely not end in a loss.”

金金金Responding to his words, the retainers quietly left.

“Father, I have a request. A once in a lifetime request.”

“Why are you being so formal Elgar? Also, isn’t it rare for you to try to coax something out of me? I don’t need to say this, but it is alright to just tell me. If it is within my abilities I will grant your request.”

金金金The viceroy, with the expression of a father leaned in towards his son happily.

“If Noel is to serve Coimbra, could she become my subordinate?”

“You want Noel as your subordinate?”

“Yes, other than that, I don’t need anything. I just wanted her to be my subordinate. This is a once in a lifetime wish, and I won’t make another one like it, father,” Elgar implored with a serious face.

金金金More than anything it was what he wanted. He thought of the hammer which she had seized and used, and that she had been quickly used as a decoy and had the bravery to survive and return. Later she returned, easily mistakable for a staff officer. He wondered which one was the true Noel, he wanted to know no matter what. He had unknowingly become fascinated by her and her carefree attitude which was sometimes masked by an alien form.

“If it is that, you don’t even need to plead for it. Is that really a suitable wish?”

“Whatever do you mean?”

“You are the man who will inherit Coimbra; no, if possible, the empire. At that time, all the retainers will serve you. Noel too.”

“That’s right.”

“You don’t need to rush. Train yourself and become a man who will lose to no one. Before that day comes, to the best of my ability, I will clear all obstacles before you to build up a solid foundation for your future. I will bare all of the people’s wrath. The one who will change Coimbra, will be you Elgar.”

金金金With those words Grohl strongly smoothed Elgar’s hair, a mix of resolution and resignation on his face. Elgar affirmed his words and accepted his silent father’s hand.

“What is this? The viceroy heard only lies! For such a horrible sin one should be thrown in jail! But Sir Wilm, that he would use such language! Who do you think you are!?”

金金金Dragging her away as though to throw her in prison, Cynthia grilled Noel. Her brow was wrinkled, and a vein bulged on her forehead.

“I wasn’t really thinking though…”

“Be serious, you idiot!!”

金金金Seriously an unbelievable woman! In front of the viceroy, even the dust should be nervous!

金金金She had frantically worried about how to introduce Noel, but she brazenly spread lies. With her smooth tongue and confident air, there was not a person who would have doubted her. It seemed like she had just thought of something, and quickly after a mischievous smile floated across her face, she smothered it with a serious expression.

“C-Cynthia Edrich, Commander of One Hundred here~. T-this journey with Lady Sarah and the young prince is isht charanchara…”

金金金Noel rattled off her Cynthia imitations whilst stood stiffly. Even minor muscle spasms were recreated, and she magnificently reenacted the earlier events.

“T-that is in imitation of me!? What a deflection!”

金金金With her face completely red, clutching her uniform just above the stomach, Noel's expression slowly paled in response. She had been too engrossed in teasing and had forgotten to secure an escape rout.

"T-this is awkward. C-Cynthia, I, I just suddenly thought to help you with some troublesome things is all," Noel used swindler's words.

"Silence, don't 'just suddenly' me!"

"It's painfwul…"

金金金Noel surrendered with both hands, and Cynthia's anger dispersed. She felt foolish herself for having expressed her anger through physical force.

"Now then, what are you going to do!?"

"What will I do, about what?"

"As I was saying, you know, what the viceroy said about entering the army or returning to your village!"

金金金With those words she released Noel, and took a moment to breath and calm down. From the start, her status as a volunteer soldier had been just a title, and was only provisional until the guards had completed their mission. Noel and the others had technically been relieved from service. For Noel who had stated her intentions, it seemed that she wished to join the military. She was the kind of person to cause all sorts of trouble with her unbridled carefree attitude, but her prowess in battle was undeniable, and her head mostly seemed to work correctly.

金金金If she asked the person herself, Cynthia felt that she would get a: 'because I had my curious glasses on' style non-answer. To put it plainly, Noel was a person she could not understand. They were both women, however, and seemed to be no more than four years apart in age. Of course their ability to get on the same wavelength from time to time was inhibited by their incompatible personalities. If anything, she felt that it might be fine if things stayed that way.

"Yup, I wonder what I'll do."

"You wonder what you'll do, aren't you fine with whatever."

"If I am to become happy it doesn't really matter where I am or what I'm doing, you know."

"Ha… Think more seriously about your own affairs."

金金金Cynthia was amazed. Joining the military came with all kinds of restrictions, but food wouldn't be a problem. Once the rebellion was put down it would become a relatively stable life, although her life would be in danger.

"Hmmm…"

"…"

金金金If she went back to the village, she wouldn't have to hold back. She knew the hardships of taking up the sword as a woman better than anyone. Enquiring further, she found that Noel had not originally lived in the village, and she had settled down in the middle of a journey. She didn't really understand, but played along anyway. Either way it was possible for Noel to live a good life. She seemed to be the type of carefree girl to smile lightly in any circumstances.

"Hey, Cynthia, do you know any methods of attaining happiness?"

金金金Noel had abruptly asked her, and although she scoffed at it initially, her serious expression pulled her in.

“The methods to becoming happy? That is so vague it becomes difficult to answer you know.”

“What I’ve heard up until now is to: eat well, sleep well, become skilled, gain many friends and companions, amass treasures, and continue winning. I have lots of others too, but many of those turned out to be no good. I’m not sure because there were so many people.”

金金金She removed a notebook from her breast pocket to confirm.

“Hmm, for me, I haven’t thought about it much so I don’t really understand.”

“Then why did you enter the military, Cynthia? Do you like fighting?”

“It isn’t that I particularly enjoy battle. It is because I inherited my family name, and I wanted to protect its knightly status.”

金金金She didn’t have the desire to protect the people or the province. It was for her own sake at the time, but she had kicked such ways out of her heart. It was the duty of the knight to serve the province and its people.

“If I do that, will I achieve happiness?”

“No, it isn’t really for that reason.”

金金金She was viewed as stupid by outsiders, endured scorn, and frantically trained. She could defend her pride and honour, but that and happiness were two different things. In the first place, she couldn’t understand well what happiness even was. Was it to find a loving family, and raise children in a warm environment? If that was the case, wouldn’t becoming a knight have been a negative thing? Why had she even taken up the sword? She built up the strength to ask herself.

“Is it possible that you don’t know either, Cynthia?”

“Yeah. What is happiness? It is a complicated and difficult question. Sorry, but I don’t really know after all.”

“I see. Then shall we search together? If we search together, we’ll surely find it,” saying so, Noel held out her hand.

“B-but, I just met you.”

“Length of time doesn’t matter you know. What is important is the opportunity, the opportunity you know. It has always been that way from the start.”

金金金Noel quickly urged her to shake hands, and Cynthia thought while looking at it.

“What is important is the opportunity, eh?”

“Yup. Ah, but I can’t do everything by myself so look after me well okay. That’s it, that’s it, undefeatable invulnerability and the like. The goal isn’t large after all.”

“Then, from that undefeatable invulnerability, a big one will come, eh? You did say to continue winning, but that isn’t a simple thing. Firstly this undefeatable invulnerability, I don’t think either of us would be qualified to speak about it so lightly…”

“As I said, we’ll stick together. Come on, Captain Cynthia.”

金金金She seemed exceedingly buoyant as she spouted words; truly a carefree individual. As expected this was the original, and the other facade had been acting. It must have been the glasses just as she claimed.

“Together with you, eh?”

“That’s right. Together we’ll aim for undefeatable invulnerability. First is the great general’s hundred victories; we’ll match it and bring about the corps’ two hundred wins.”

“…”

金金金Noel drolly flashed her white teeth. While she thought it was all foolishness, she had grown to find that it wasn’t entirely bad. After all there was nothing preventing her from taking the hand. It was true that increasing the number of people increased the chance of the target being found. What they could feasibly accomplish, she didn’t know, but the point was that they were acknowledging their friendship. Cynthia nodded once and grasped Noel’s right hand. She decided it was alright to ignore the small details of how things would work out in a friendship between a superior officer and a subordinate. Noel was that kind of person after all.

“I, I’ll be counting on you.”

“Yup, together we shall continue to win and achieve happiness!”

金金金Hearing the phrase that was similar to the words from the killer’s story earlier, Cynthia made a wry smile, then she remembered what she had to do. If she had to say, it was that moment that was the best so far.

“There is one thing I forgot to say.”

“What is it?”

“However things turn out, the fact that you helped will remain. That is, that… tentatively you have my thanks. Yeah.”

“Ah, you don’t need to mind it.”

“There is no way that will happen! I will seriously…”

“I see. Then it is fine to always care. It doesn’t bother me after all.”

金金金Noel, with a smile, grasped her glasses and flew from the room.

Author’s Note:

Noel’s treasures:

Battered picture book, bident, iron war hammer with blood and dirt, the glasses she received from Cynthia, the glasses that make her smarter.

Translator’s Note:

Only 6 or so hours late… Sleep is for the week.

Editor’s Note:

It’s the opportunity, It’s

the opportunity, It’s the opportunity, It’s the opportunity, It’s

PsychoBarcodeTranslations

恥恥恥Noel received the status of a leader of ten when she came under military employ. Because it seemed that at that rate she would permanently receive the uniform which she had initially borrowed from Cynthia. Noel happily went to show it off to Mirut and the other villagers as it had already become one of her precious treasures.

恥恥恥Mirut and the villagers, meanwhile, had found they had become temporary soldiers until the rebellion was crushed. As it had been decidedly too dangerous to head back to the village for the moment, it was thought that they could earn their keep in the army. Their lives would be at risk, but they could accumulate some wealth, though that would be cheap compensation for their lives if they died.

恥恥恥The meeting to plan for the rebel army's destruction by the southern Coimbra military was still underway, so the soldiers were frantically rushing to and fro. Men reorganised to retake Rockbell, and with their commander already chosen, they proceeded to notify those he would lead.

恥恥恥On another note, Noel and the volunteer soldiers were temporarily placed under Cynthia. Not a single person questioned why she had accepted a young girl with minimal training, and of little fame. Leaving aside that she was a small fry as a leader of ten, although she was of the lowest caste of officers, she still had to be treated appropriately. The greatest of the troubles bundled with the volunteers was that it would be difficult to properly command a group whose war potential was unknown. Cynthia too worried how to handle them, but for the moment she would simply give them assignments with relatively low levels of risk. As expected, they couldn't suddenly become the kind of people who could be readily deployed on the front lines.

"Basically, I have become the one who is taking you all in from now on. I, Noel, Leader of Ten, or should I say captain, will."

恥恥恥Noel was reclining self-importantly in her uniform. Her gestures were like the average commander of one thousand. Sitting, Mirut and the others raised their gazes to her with stupefied expressions.

"I did hear you joined the army, but why are you suddenly in charge of ten? Isn't that strange?"

"It's the reward from the viceroy."

"Sorry, but I don't get it."

"Well, for now I am an officer because of it. Don't be rude to your superior, if you understand, reply."

恥恥恥Ignoring her position under Cynthia, Noel spouted whatever she pleased.

"We're suddenly told to honour you, eh? Don't ask for the impossible. Aren't you the most disrespectful one here?"

恥恥恥The villagers agreed with Mirut's words.

"The most important thing is how you became an officer. It's weird for a commoner woman who isn't even a knight to suddenly be promoted."

"That's why I'm only in charge of ten, but even though you said all those things just now, it still leaves me ten times greater than you. Hey, isn't that amazing?"

"I don't think so at all. Sir Cynthia is somehow dignified, you just… aren't."

“I can’t lack that much dignity.”

“No matter how much you dress up in uniforms, with that attitude, and your tone of voice, you totally do.”

“Oh…”

恥恥恥Noel stopped reclining and looked disappointed.

“If it’s like that, stop saying stupid things, and obediently go to sir Cynthia. That way your talk with her will finish sooner.”

恥恥恥Noel knew her combat strength best of all, but leading a group into battle was probably impossible for her. She had recently been a simple hunter together with them not too long ago after all. Although it would only be for a short while, they would be entrusting their lives to her, and so they wished for a more reliable commanding officer; preferably someone with lots of combat experience like Ned or Geb from the Red Circle Army.

“Cynthia, as a commander of one hundred, is busy preparing for mobilization so there is really no time to care for us new recruits. She’s hurriedly rushing about all over the place you know.”

“Then it would be better if we were on standby until she is free. We’re just here to pad the numbers, and you’re only a leader of ten in name right?”

“Yup, so that means you won’t listen to my words no matter what?

“Sorry, but that’s how it is. We can vaguely comply, so you should vaguely do it too. Just so long as nobody dies.”

恥恥恥Mirut had responded while yawning. Although he had left the rebellion, he had no real reason to fight for Coimbra. He trained pitifully because he planned on quitting as soon as possible regardless of what happened. If he was rewarded for correctly going through the motions, all the better. His true profession was that of the hunter.

“It’s as you say Mirut.”

“True, true.”

“Ah, I thought it would probably turn out this way. That’s why I brought along a treasure to use just in case.”

恥恥恥As she spoke, Noel tied back her hair, and put on her glasses. Her sudden eccentricity most likely greatly bewildered Mirut and the villagers. A short time later, after she had changed her facial expression, she highhandedly snapped her hands onto her hips.

“I really didn’t want to do this, but there was no other way.”

“W-what?”

“On this continent, every military in existence, without exception, has distinctions of class. Talking back to your superior is not allowed. Carve that into your unworthy skulls!”

“S-suddenly putting on glasses, what are you saying? Did you hit your head somewhere?”

恥恥恥Noel had begun to speak in overbearing military tones similar to Cynthia’s. With a manner of speaking like a young officer, her words immediately struck the listeners. It was like she and Cynthia were a pair. Despite her being a young woman, she had that same mysterious indefinable something as Cynthia. Something they did not have themselves. It was probably along the lines of dignity or impact. Whatever it was, Noel was radiating it.

“Is this way of speaking better? Now is the time for correction. Those who still say they don’t understand, be sure to

memorize it. Those who still don't get it after that are truly beyond saving. That is what the former me was taught. One final confirmation, is this manner of speaking good?"

恥恥恥Smiling, Noel took up the iron hammer from her belt. Commanding the situation, she beat out the seconds rhythmically in the palm of her hand. The hammer had a red stain, but it was already too late for them to ask what it was. Mirut and the others who had seen it crash down upon the enemy soldiers had their faces unconsciously stiffen in dread. Noel played with it lightly, but the iron mass had the power to destroy a heavy wooden door. If it were to hit a skull, it would crack it open like a nut. There was no mistaking it for those who were witnesses. Mirut straightened his back and corrected his speech.

"M-my apologies, Captain Noel."

"Very well. I ought to explain the military regulations that we will be following. If you break regulation, regardless of your being new recruits, punishment will be dealt. You are not going to be able to pass it off with some cowardly 'because I'm just a villager' nonsense. Do you understand?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"Too quiet! When you acknowledge orders you are to all salute. 'My insufficient mind has comprehended your words,' is what your speech, and body-language must express."

"U-understood!"

恥恥恥Back straight, Mirut saluted as he had seen Noel do before. The others too, hurriedly stood and saluted. After that, she scowled at them with a tremendous glare.

"All right, so from now on we'll continue together. You will only be in the army for a short time, but it only takes one instant to die. The time after a death is painful and pointless, so it is best to do what we can when we can."

恥恥恥Noel removed her glasses, gently smiled, and gave them all a friendly salute.

"Eh?"

"That went surprisingly well. As expected of Cynthia's methods. It had an outstanding effect on the new recruits."

"W-was that all just acting?"

"Yup, all that was just me mimicking you; your sharp eyes and proud speech. Well, when you aren't flapping away in nervousness. So, was I close?"

"Ah, yeah. You looked like a real officer. Ah, that is, it was like you were a different person."

恥恥恥That kind of performance was not an easy thing. She had a genuine murderous intent when threatening them to follow all orders if they valued their lives. For example, in a real battle, Mirut would probably obey his orders to thrust deep into enemy lines. He knew disobedience meant death, so compliance was only natural. The image of what had happened before was still engraved in his memories, and so he worried over using respectful language. He could not say that he wouldn't suddenly change.

"That's great. You can see how much smarter I become when I put on my glasses right? I'll put them on any time I need to act important."

恥恥恥Noel wrapped her glasses in a cloth and politely placed them in her pocket, and with practiced hands, untied her hair.

"If at that time they were to oppose you, what were you going to do?"

“Of course I would wallop them. If they don’t understand words, that way is the fastest. That is how education works right?”

恥恥恥Her mouth arched into a ferocious smile. Even though she did not have her glasses on, an aura identical to the one she had before poured out of the redheaded girl in an instant. Seeing that, Mirut and the villagers wholeheartedly made their decision. For the time they were in the military, they would not oppose Noel. She squared up with her subordinates, and instead of a salute, she flourished her hammer imposingly. If they really thought about it, she had already slain several Baharan soldiers, so she was different from them, who had not yet killed a single man.

“Um, okay, you should abide by the following rules. It is an extremely important thing for soldiers after all. Failure will result in the death penalty, so be sure to take it to heart.”

恥恥恥Noel took the paper which had the military regulations written on it and began to explain them. She was told to tell them the military regulations, and methods for saluting that Cynthia had taught her. Many things were written down in detail, but Noel only explained three: obey orders, do not try to flee, do not betray companions. All were obvious things, but in combat they were difficult to uphold; especially the second one about running away. When faced with an inferior position, with a tendency to become indecisive, humans would place themselves first and flee when faced from imminent disaster. It would cause formations to collapse, leading to a mass rout. Consequently, to keep the morale high, the commanders had to maintain a brave, composed front. This was the same thing that had been forcefully beaten into Noel. She was not reading the paper, but going from memory.

“This is a secret, but it is fine if you inadvertently break and run. Sitting and waiting for death is just foolishness.”

“Is it alright to say that?”

“In the final moments, it is best if you think about it yourselves; about when you can, or cannot follow orders; about whether you fight, or don’t fight. Whether or not you will live is a separate matter though.”

“…”

“That is what I did. On that day, I decided to after all.”

恥恥恥After she spoke, Noel smiled. No matter how fun a time was, that day, that place’s memory, would darken Noel’s mood for it called to mind the faces of those she lost. Her surfacing thoughts were never of their smiles, but of abandoned rotting corpses in a hole, the gooey sensation she had come unstuck from, the stench that pierced her nose, and the cold rain. In those times, she looked to the brilliant sun, shining down from the heavens. Noel could not do without the sun for it was her greatest treasure. Though there were things she could never grasp with her hands, she could see them as much as she liked. That much was enough for her.

“That is basically the end. Well, our job isn’t to wave swords, but your own time is a separate matter.”

“What exactly does that mean?”

恥恥恥One of the villagers had begun to use respectful language. They had completely learned how to behave as subordinates. If not that, their fear would set in.

“It is important to deliver messages between the different corps. Captain Cynthia will teach you all sorts of things later. I’m looking forward to how that will work.”

“I-it’s that then. I thought that they’d surely just abruptly have us stand at the front.”

“Even if they sent useless ones to the front, you’d only just add to the number of corpses you know,” Noel said her harsh words with a smile.

恥恥恥If that was their duty, then the chances of death were much lower. Mirut and the others let out a relieved breath. After all, they didn't want to die, and none of them had ever killed a man before. Mirut prayed from the bottom of his heart that they could continue in that way until the rebellion ended. He wondered what it felt like to kill other people. Although the idea had come abruptly, it was not something he could ask Noel, for at the very least, if she hadn't done it, then he and his fellow villagers would have died. He was an idiot for worrying over such things.

"Come to think of it, you've finally started using respectful language. Honestly, it doesn't suit you at all. See, your faces have been all strained since earlier."

恥恥恥Noel poked her cheeks, and Mirut twisted his body whilst making a face of displeasure.

"Didn't you tell us to? Furthermore, shouldn't you need to properly call sir Cynthia 'captain' as well?"

"Yup, when I called her that in public, she got angry, you know. If someone disrespects a superior, the truth is, on top of punishment, that person will also be sent to an isolation cell."

恥恥恥She didn't worry about it herself, but the other officers had warned Cynthia with unpleasant faces. As it was not good to cause trouble for friends, Noel had put on an act. Mimicking others and abiding by the rules was one of her strong points.

"Well, it will just have to be put up with while in the military, uh, captain Noel."

恥恥恥Having to be so formal with a girl of the same generation created an unpleasant feeling. However, it was troubling to suddenly change again, so Mirut steeled himself to do it as much as he could.

"Yup, that's the way."

恥恥恥Speaking briefly, she told them it was time to take a break, and sat. In that way she lay, eyes closed with happy thoughts as she soaked in the sunlight. There wasn't likely another in the military's employ who was so carefree. It made one wonder if she was important, or an idiot. Thinking such things, Mirut too lowered himself so that his back was on the ground, and then he began to ask something that he had been curious about for a while. If he evaded this chance, he might never again find another one.

"Hey…"

"Already tired of respect, eh?"

"Just for now. I'll use it properly later."

"I see."

"Why did you join the army? If you're a regular you won't be able to return to the village even after the rebellion has died down. If you aren't good, you might just die."

恥恥恥At Mirut's question, Noel opened her eyes to the sun, and reached out to it with her hand.

"It's because I made a promise with Cynthia and the young prince."

恥恥恥She would search for happiness with Cynthia, and had arranged that when Elgar became great, he would share his happiness with her too. She didn't particularly hate the village, but she felt that the happiness she so longed for was beyond her grasp when she was there.

"As I thought, spending your whole life in such a declining village is disagreeable right?"

恥恥恥Mirut plucked out a nearby weed and held it in his mouth. The others too, quieted and listened to the

conversation.

“Not really, you and Cal live there so I wouldn’t hate it at all you know. Living in the village was truly fun, but…”

“But?”

“If I was alone, I think it might have been fine for me to be there, but I’m not alone. I absolutely have to find enough happiness for everyone’s portion. If I can’t do that much I have to at least carry on until the very end. So…”

恥恥恥Noel cut herself off.

“Can you really find it here?”

“I don’t know. What I do know is that I am a little better at fighting than most. I’ll gain many companions, never stop winning, and become great. I think this is the best way out of all the things I’ve been taught. I’m just impaired trash riddled with foolishness, so I can’t think of anything else.”

恥恥恥Noel self-depreciated with a carefree expression. Mirut couldn’t tell if it was what she truly thought.

“You do know that you might die, right?”

“It can’t be helped. Such seems to be the way of the world.”

“I see…”

“Yup.”

“You know, out of all of us, you were the one to become promoted. You surely aren’t an impaired idiot.”

“Is it like that?”

“Give me guarantee. I’m properly asking you Captain Noel! Our lives depend on it you know.”

恥恥恥Mirut patted her shoulder as if to cheer her on. Her body was small, but her muscles were like a monster’s, and tense. After Mirut’s voice died down, the other villagers joined in too, raising their voices with ‘that’s right, that’s right,’ and other such things. Their spirits unbroken, after hearing the conversation the young ones became worked up. They didn’t really have any loyalty to Coimbra, and they were still afraid of dying, but as though they had been enchanted, they could not release their gazes from Noel. In that moment she shone frightfully bright in their minds.

“Of course! I’ll work with all my might so that none of you die pointlessly, okay!”

恥恥恥Nodding strongly, Noel stood. The light of the sun shone strongly on her back. Mirut, who had watched Noel’s face the whole time, without thinking, held up his hand to block the light. In that instant, he saw some dark shadows behind Noel. It was not simply one or two, it was some dozens, no, it could have even been hundreds. He saw their bodies tremble with pleasure. Without thinking, he shut his eyes, and the instant he opened them again, the black shadows had all disappeared.

恥恥恥Was that my imagination just now?

恥恥恥I’m not alone. Noel’s words chillingly rang through his head. The other villagers were still entranced as before, and Mirut wondered why the thin cold sheet of trepidation had enveloped him.

恥恥恥Noel and the others had received drums, gongs, and trumpets from the military warehouse, and headed to

the harbour. They had initially practiced on the parade ground, but as that had bothered the other units, they were told to go somewhere else. It was that they were so bad, their morale dropped, causing trouble for Cynthia.

“This certainly is bad. Yes, it is completely so bad that it hurts my ears with its unpleasantness. It might be able to demoralise the enemy.”

恥恥恥Cynthia voiced her honest opinion.

“It isn’t sub-par, it’s hopeless. No matter how many times I try, I just can’t remember the right amount of strength to use.”

恥恥恥Mirut’s shoulders drooped as he clutched his drumsticks.

“That’s obvious. March, attack, stalemate, retreat, withdraw; if these things are not conveyed to the soldiers, there is no significance. In summary, that stupid way of doing it is meaningless.”

恥恥恥Cynthia poked Noel’s face, who complained about the pain with her eyes. While she was at it, Noel emitted a piteous sound, a trumpet in her mouth. It was popular in the navy, but for soldiers who fought on land, it wasn’t used much. Though it could be played, skill and experience were necessary, which was the cause of the current situation. Horns and drums were the mainstream signaling devices.

“How about you stop using the trumpet, and obediently switch over to percussion? You’ve already figured out the basics of it, and there is no real point in being stubborn.”

恥恥恥Cynthia attempted persuasion, but Noel shook her head. Noel had become interested in the trumpet which seemed to hold some nebulous history. It also looked good. She stored up breath in her cheeks, and with full force made a honk, but as expected, it was bad.

“Well, I can understand the appeal of that trumpet, but it is an ornament after all.”

恥恥恥Ignoring the honk that came from beside her, Cynthia continued with her talk.

“To tell the truth, I saw it in an old biography, but it seems to have belonged to an old Coimbra military or naval band. They marched to a plethora of elegant tunes. I’m sure it was a magnificent thing.”

恥恥恥It was a story from before the unification of the continent, from the Coimbra which had been overflowing with money, and was a bastion of high culture. Many musicians and artists had gathered, and that steady flow had affected the military. In stately uniforms, to musical accompaniment, the marching soldiers created a sight enough to overwhelm any spectators. Noel bit onto Cynthia’s story.

“That sounds super fun. Hey, did everyone walk as they sang?”

“Yes. The people forgot their fear of soldiers, morale skyrocketed, and it seems like they wanted to face an enemy. With a heroic tune, they all stepped in perfect order. In a battle they believed they would defeat their enemy; such were their aims.”

“Oh, how amazing, but did it work out?”

“No, unfortunately they completely failed. They were ambushed in the middle of a performance and saw a terrible encounter. Furthermore, it was only a small number of enemies that they faced. No fewer than half of the soldiers held instruments, and as they had neglected preparations, of course that was how it went. Since then, army bands have gone out of fashion.”

恥恥恥It was the one disgrace during Coimbra’s golden age. The other kingdom’s military writings cited it as an example of failure, and it was an anecdote that had been well recorded. It became the proof to the saying: ‘They

have money, but no men.’ That was not the only history of Coimbra’s weak soldiery, and there were many other examples of the weakness which was often laughed at.

“It still sounds fun. I really want to see it. I bet it looked magnificent. Hey Cynthia, don’t you think so?”

“I don’t think that there is enough leisure time for a musical performance mid battle. There surely wouldn’t be time for it under a hail of arrows. Sorry, but I don’t want to try it at all. As long as it doesn’t get in the way of what you are doing, you can do as you please.”

“I get it. Hey, Mirut, you want to right? Let’s have a parade sometime together.”

“Sir Cynthia, please refrain from assisting Leader of Ten, Noel’s superfluous ideas. We should not earnestly attempt such foolish things.”

“Right, sorry. She’s an idiot, so she would seriously try it.”

“Even though I can hear all of that…”

“Of course.”

恥恥恥Noel honked her trumpet yet again in protest.

恥恥恥She and the others continued in that way for no less than half of a day, hard at practice. Cynthia had to take care of her own duties, and so she had gone back. Tooting away, Noel looked out over the harbour as the scent of the waves tickled her nose. Occasionally, things like trade ships or fishing boats would depart, and each time she honked triumphantly. Although she was of little skill, the light tune lightened her mood more than expected. It illuminated that after all, music was as fun as she had expected. Those who had once thought to introduce the old military and naval bands must have thought so too. Mirut and the others came back from the direction of the market that now lacked its former prosperity. Their arms had grown weary and so they had said they would take a break. From what she could see they had bought food and clothing with their stipend.

“You’re still at it? Why don’t you just stop being ridiculous and give it up?”

“I still won’t give up yet. Is that food?”

“Yes, I also bought some things for the captain.”

恥恥恥Mirut pushed the trumpet aside. Inside the bag was some deep fried fish.

“Thanks.”

恥恥恥Plucking one from the bag, she tasted it. It was very salty. With that feeling, she blew into her trumpet. A good sound, much better than before came out.

“And here, this is a souvenir. In celebration of being promoted to being a leader of ten, and also as a bit of an apology.”

“Apology? Have you done something bad?”

“Ah, it’s nothing. Anyway, please accept it. It is a problem of my own emotions after all.”

恥恥恥Saying that, Mirut unveiled a cute fish-embroidered accessory case and handed it over.

“…”

“What happened that you are so silent? You don’t like it?”

“Nope, it’s not that at all! Somehow, I was thinking that my treasures sure had multiplied. I just thought that I might be a bit happy now.”

恥恥恥Noel flashed her white teeth, and smiled in a good mood from the bottom of her heart. Even though it had only been the picture book and the curious spear until then, her treasures had grown such that she could no longer hold them all in both hands. The dreadful hammer that hung from her belt, the uniform and glasses she received from Cynthia, the case she had received from Mirut, and finally, the trumpet; all were hers.

“See, you brought your glasses right? I thought you might be able to put them in there. It can soften impacts when you put it in your pocket.”

“I get it, it’s just as you say. Thanks!”

恥恥恥She quickly placed her glasses in it. It was just big enough and they fit completely inside. The fish embroidery gave off a good impression. Its eyes were smiling, and it was a truly wonderful thing. That was what Noel thought.

“Ahem, well then, Mirut, and all of you, as thanks I will put my feelings into music for you here.”

“That doesn’t make me particularly happy though…”

“Here I go!”

恥恥恥A slightly happy feeling was produced now that she blew well. Most important was the occasion, and her preparedness when she closed her eyes, and adjusted her breathing. The tune from a departing boat could be heard, and Noel too began to play the trumpet. It was both light and loud; her trumpet resounded. What came out was the sound of returning waves, and the departing trumpet played a melody reminding them of the ocean. Though the only ones to hear it were Mirut and the others, after so much time, their drums and gongs finally kept in time.

恥恥恥Lured in by Noel’s performance, their breaths became one. It was glorious enough that it might have received Cynthia’s approval. As great waves became one with the sea, the harbour which had become desolate regained its liveliness for a fleeting moment. Coimbra’s harbour brought to the city, resounding over the water, the songs of departing ships. Men and ships came and went; merchants took their goods to the performance in the city which was no longer busy. The fisherman, and the merchants who were in the marketplace, for a short while, felt they could hear the city’s former glory. Noel who had finally tired, ended her performance, and Mirut and the others also stayed their hands. At that same moment, applause arose from the surroundings. Their numbers were not large, but those who applauded did so with full force, and it rang out from the bottom of their hearts which were filled with a profound satisfaction.

“Noel’s Army Band’s first performance was a great success, eh?”

“Since when were we a band? Erm, when did we become one?”

“Just now. I named it: Noel’s Army Band.”

恥恥恥With a proud face, Noel gave a thumbs up. Her choice had resulted in a great success, and she lightly twirled her trumpet. Everyone had the power to find fun in both performing, and listening to music. It was almost a curious kind of magic.

“Hey, let’s start up a serious army band one day, okay?”

“I’ll get to the bottom of Coimbra’s disgrace, so isn’t stopping a good way?”

“I’ll hoist a magnificent flag, and march to the trumpet. It will definitely be fun. We’ll fight together under the same banner, through life or death. That is how companions are.”

恥恥恥What Noel had described was a flag of her beloved sun. It was not the military flag of the Horsheido empire. That flag was nothing more than a sham; a total forgery. What Noel desired, was the real sun. To properly display the sun’s for was difficult. At a glance it appeared to be a simple circle, but there was more to it than that. It was a ball of light, not a circle. She did not know how one could adequately convey a ball of light. She thought of the outline, but if it was just an outline that would be unsatisfactory. It wasn’t good enough at all. The Horsheido army’s battle flag bore the sun’s rays in a cruciform pattern, but it was in vain. That flag was painted red, and for her own, orange would be good, but a red to match her hair would also be nice.

“W-well, it can be a bit fun I guess.”

“I know, right? So, at that time Mirut, and you all too, should join in.”

“I am going to leave the army when the rebellion ends. It is unfortunate that my job involves killing.”

“It is regrettable.”

“W-we will follow you!”

恥恥恥The young ones from the village continued on with ‘me too, me too,’ for some time as she saw them step forward.

“Success! Then let’s make a magnificent army band and show it to Mirut!”

“Yeah!”

“Okay, I’ll enjoy myself too you know. Hey, has this also become a promise?”

恥恥恥Mirut looked to Noel with hopeful eyes for affirmation, but Noel tilted her head, not understanding. It was her principle to never promise something she could not fulfill, for if she did not follow through, she could not find happiness.

“Yup, I’m not alone so I might be overdoing my promises, but hang in there, okay.”

“I see, well, please don’t forget. Hey, shouldn’t we head back about now? Let’s surprise sir Cynthia with the fruits of our labours.”

“It’s a good enough time. All right, then, a trumpet for the charge! Noel company, commence assault!”

恥恥恥Noel, rapidly playing the trumpet, suddenly broke out into a run. Mirut and the villagers rushed forwards, unbroken.

Author’s Note:

Leader of Ten, Noel (Glasses on)

Her face looks good. She plays the trumpet.

The glasses are important as they allow her to not break her act.

Glasses Skills:

- Trumpet of Protest
- Assault Trumpet
- Wake-up Trumpet

Translator's Note:

恥恥恥

One day your extra chapters will come. Look forward to it because I'll try to surprise you all with them when the time feels right, and I have a sufficient quantity.

恥 Editor's Note 恥

If you are reading this, the editor didn't. You will have to put up with a small rant from your lovely translator who worked this week with only the promise of an editor. 7 of the last 9 chapters have only had a rough draft before going on the site, and were edited at the last second. It hadn't been a problem until, well, just now. This week you guys get to read my translation unchecked by the normalcy of another human.

I wonder what the red stain on Noel's hammer is. Blood wouldn't still be red after all.

< Previous Chapter | Index | Next Chapter >